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and

TERENCE SMITH

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IRISH WRITING

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SEAN O'FAOLAIN

THE SIGHING AGE

Al tempo de' dolci sospiri.

1.

THE first time Frances saw him she almost laughed. His cheeks were furry. His boots much too big. His wrists stuck out of his sleeves. His small brother, who was lame, clutched him trustingly by the hand. He was seated opposite her in the tram, staring rigidly in front of him; but he caught her amused look and coloured to the roots of his hair.

The second time she saw him his sleeves were down to his knuckles and his trousers ends lapped his heels. These long and short sleeves stuck in her mind so firmly that, four years after, when they met and spoke she reminded him of them. He said, without a smile: - 'My mother always had my clothes made too big for me. She used to say to me, "At the rate you are growing your sleeves will be short long enough."'

He saw no joke in his mother's remark.

'You blushed the first time I saw you,' she teased.

'That was because you were laughing at me.'

'Oh, but I wasn't, Paul! not really! I was only smiling to myself because it was so hard to tell whether you were in charge of Johnny or Johnny in charge of you.'

'You blushed, too,' he said softly.

She blushed now as she cried: - I did *not*! And if I did it was because Johnny was staring at me. He always did when we passed in the street. And you pulling him along by the hand!'

People always stared at her cornfair hair and her blue eyes. Her cheeks were pale but warm like the inside of a sea-shell. She was slim as a larch. In our city, where everybody knows everybody, she was better known than the statue. People talked of her 'niceness', meaning that the nice thing about her beauty was her ignorance of it.

Young students are like winged centaurs, half-animal, half-angel. When pretty girls walk across the quadrangle the men watch them with the eyes of young satyrs. The girls stare straight in front of them; they guess the remarks. But not even the grossest of these centaurs talked about her. They would watch her pass in awed silence.

One night three of them got drunk and clustered around her window (she lived near the college) jabbering close to the glass, mouthing and making love-noises. When she opened the door to reproach them the hall-light set an aureole behind her fair head. The three pawed the ground and glummed foolishly.

'Go home at once, please,' she commanded.

They could say nothing.

'At once!' she commanded, and stamped her heel and tossed her hand at them as if they were stray dogs. Since they seemed unable to move or speak, she closed the door slowly. They felt the wind and the darkness. They wandered away, arm in arm, up the leafy road, singing in harmony, in and out of green moons of lamplight. They wailed:-

'She's my Lily of Laguna. My Lily and my ro-o-ose.'

For this the three were condemned on all sides and Paul wrote in the college magazine a satirical poem, which was very obscure and very long, based on the Canticle of the Three Children, *Trium puerorum cantemus hymnum*. For this poem she thanked him with cool dignity at a students' dance. It was while they circled that she had asked about those long-short sleeves. She asked him if his small brother had always been afflicted, and could his lameness not be cured? When she sighed 'Poor little kid,' he wished it was he who was lame.

After that one dance he went straight home, his fingers still tingled with the touch of her stays. As he descended through the grounds he frowned at a giggling in the shrubbery. He recalled her bantering way of talking; about their work, their professors, their fellow-students, a film they had both seen. He felt that she had a screen about her that would protect her from 'that sort of thing'.

Of course the girl-students spotted at once what was happening and began to tease him without mercy. He did not notice it. To all their mock-serious questions he replied politely, for he had exquisite manners. When they said: 'Now you should begin to shave,' he said he had not thought of it, but that he might trim his down-with his nail-scissors.

'But why should I?' he asked.

'Ladies don't like whiskers, you know! They get in the way.'

They were enchanted when he replied that he did not quite follow. Not that they belittled him; he was a first-rate student, they liked his manners; he came of a good family (his father had been a general); and the men said he was a marvel at wing three-quarter. But they found his innocence provoking.

All innocence is a provocation. One winter afternoon the hard-bitten medical women roasted her, as they gossiped over the club-fire. With the cigarettes dangling from their lips and their extended fingers still smelling from the iodoform of the cadavers that they had been dissecting they tried to dissect her. They talked of sexual hyphedonia. She was a case of hypoaesthesia. They wondered if she would ever come awake. The male medicals joined in. The sexes titillated each other with her modesty. One of the men took up a challenge: the women laid him ten to one in half-crowns that he would not get her to come to the Opera the following week. He stopped her bluntly in the quad the next

morning and asked her plump out to come on Monday night to 'Rigoletto'.

She said she was awfully sorry but she had an appointment that night.

'Well, then, Tuesday night? It's 'Madame Butterfly'.'

'I don't really like 'Madame Butterfly', she said.

'All right, what about Wednesday night? 'Carmen'.'

'I have an appointment for Wednesday night.'

'Thursday night?'

'Unfortunately I must go somewhere on Thursday night.'

'Friday night?'

She excused herself again; and for Saturday night.

He drove into town on his motor-bicycle and bought her a box of chocolates two feet long by one foot wide, with great satin pink bows, and left it for her at the porter's lodge. Half the college came in to look at it. She wrote his name on it and handed it back to the porter. He wrote her name on it and handed it back to the porter. Their two names were scribbled all over the box before he surrendered.

When Paul heard of this he publicly insulted the fellow and they fought it out with bare fists in the quarry, and since his father, while neglecting to teach the boy anything else had taught him how to box, just as his mother, while neglecting his personal appearance, had taught him beautiful manners, he knocked out his man. For a week the pair sported a black eye apiece. The women students were in ecstasies; with a curious delicacy they never told her.

2.

That summer the two brothers went to a seacoast village in the West of Ireland to study Irish, as so many young boys and girls used to do in those years. It was barely a village—a mere scatter of cottages. Indeed there were more people staying in the hotel at the far end of the village than in the whole white-washed cluster of the village. Paul was now nineteen. Johnny was about sixteen, with a soft dark down shadowing his cheeks and his upper lip. His sleeves were too short for his wrists; his coat ill-fitted his lame hip. One morning Paul cried:

'Look who's here! Francie!'

'And who may Francie be?' Johnny asked sullenly, refusing to look.

'Don't be silly! You know her well. When you were twelve,' he laughed, 'you used say you'd marry her when you grew up.'

Johnny said with lofty dignity:

'I haven't the faintest recollection.'

She was with her mamma and her sister Angela. Angela was handsome and vivacious but she quacked like a guinea-hen. She was much older than her sister. She was a heavy-handed flirt.

That first day she made Paul squirm by saying, in her slow, refined suburbanite's drawl,

'Mister Po-o-ower, I may as well confess to you-u-u that my heart is like a corridor-train.' And she gave him a babyish leer.

Another afternoon he heard her talking to Tony Meltrum. He was a wellknown man in the county, a wool-exporter, apparently an old family friend of the O'Brien's: he had driven them down in his car. When he would not play cards with her she drawled:

'O-o-oh! Th-a-at's very unchivalrous of you, Mister Meltrum. I always thought gentlemen would do a-anything for cha-arming young la-adies?'

Her curly eyelashes fell.

Johnny said viciously that she was an idiot. Paul laughed but agreed. They liked the mother even less, a vigorous, garrulous woman, so white with powder that she looked like a snow-storm. She breathed scented confidence over Paul, whispering like a Madam:—

'I'm worried about Francie, Mister Power. She is so retiring. And, you know, Mister Power it doesn't *do*. Not in this world. The competition is too keen.'

She talked to him about his family and his career. She seemed to encourage his friendship with Frances. She even helped him on, with nods and smiles and whispers, when he took to going off alone on expeditions with her. Johnny said furiously one day that she was 'an old snake'. That was after he had been left alone since morning. Paul defended her. They squabbled unpleasantly.

In lonely places even the animals cluster. The vacancy of the mountains drew the boy and girl together. They climbed high the mountain-flanks until the inlets of the sea were fingers and the islands white-edged specks. Above them the clouds castled like arrested explosions. There they would lie side by side against a rock, feeling single because they felt solitary, silent because they had no need of words. One day he traced with his finger the five delicate metacarpal bones on the back of her hand; she smiled up at him and they were betrothed. The next day they kissed. The next evening they lay in one another's arms until the sun shone pink through the ears of the rabbits.

That night when they came back to the hotel he caught her mamma looking hard at her. When he turned away he found Johnny's eyes fixed darkly on him. Turning aside from him he saw Mr. Meltrum looking across at Mrs. O'Brien with raised eyebrows, and Mrs. O'Brien beaming at the sky. That night Johnny said, from his bed,

'You'd better look out. Meltrum is Francie's guardian. He doesn't like you.'

Paul snapped furiously at him to mind his own business.

That was on the Wednesday of his last week. On the Thursday he led Frances to talk about her father. He had died six years before. He had been a doctor. She had loved him very

much; even more than her mamma. She was terrified that her mamma would get married again. Far off they heard the double report of a shot-gun.

'Do you approve of Mr. Meltrum?' he asked her suddenly, and saw the big, pipe-smoking man, six-foot two, broad as a horse, full of animal health and spirits, lavish with his money, jokes bubbling from him, laughter bellowing. He remembered how the whites of his eyes showed all around his grey pupils, giving him an intent, eager look. He would be like that now, his gun lowered, his hand about to click on his retriever. 'I mean,' he added, 'as a step-father?'

Frances laughed.

'Mr. Meltrum doesn't want to marry mamma.'

She plucked a bit of grass and began to bite it gently. She looked long at him, her eyes passive and calm.

'He wants,' she said, still biting, 'to marry me.'

A sheep bleated several times before he disengaged his arm and sat up.

'And all the time,' he said, 'I thought your mamma was trying to . . . to . . .'

He jumped up and cried:

'Let's climb to the very peak!'

They stood, hand in hand, and looked where a lark sang, invisibly, never pausing for breath; then they climbed without a rest until they found a tiny loch, dark as lead, crumpled by the strong sea-wind. Her hair flowed in a torrent about her face. Turning to dash it from her eyes, she pointed to the pink speck of the hotel.

'What's the time? I have to go to a dance to-night. Mamma fixed it with Mr. Meltrum.'

He said he was a fat old man. She said he was an old family-friend. He said he was a boor. She said he was very kind to them.

'He helped to educate Angela and me.'

He said the fellow was nothing but a baby-snatcher. She said he had no right to say such coarse things, and walked away from him. After half an hour he was calling her name into the wind. He found her curled under a thicket of purple heather. She looked up at him as passively as a cat. He flung himself down beside her. Their mouths met.

The hotel windows were yellow when they walked up the path, hand in hand. Meltrum was standing in the porch, beside Angela, his eyes darting from one to the other of them. Angela winked lewdly at the two of them under his elbow.

'I hope you are not going to be late for this dance, Frances?' he said authoritatively.

Just then Mrs. O'Brien came out and whirled her indoors. Paul was walking away when Meltrum called after him:--

'Hi! Youngster! Can I have a word with you?'

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Paul closed the garden gate and looked back over it, but did not stir.

'Come and have a beer. Or a lemonade,' Meltrum said breezily.

The boy looked at him.

'Well, if Mahomet won't come to the mountain,' Meltrum laughed. 'Not that I like the comparison on any count.' He went to the gate. 'I'll stroll down the road with you.'

They walked side by side. After a moment Meltrum said:

'Young man, are you in a position to support a wife?'

'I don't see,' the boy replied, coldly, but not in an unmanly way, 'how that can concern anybody but myself.'

'As a matter of fact, young fellow-me-lad, it happens to concern me rather a lot. You see, I'm her father's executor. Jimmy O'Brien was one of my best friends. I had a great gra for him. A grand fellow! Though, between you and me, he had no head for business. And, he didn't get on very well with Mrs. O. Faults on both sides and all the rest of it. Nihil de mortuis, and all the rest of it. Just the same, when poor old Jimmy died he left his family damn near the workhouse. I'm not boasting, but for the last five years I've been putting my hand pretty deep in my pocket for those two girls. So you see.'

'See? See what?'

'That I've every right to look on myself, as you might say, in loco parentis.'

'In the position of father? May I ask, Mr. Meltrum, if in spite of that you have some idea of marrying Miss O'Brien yourself?'

The little sting did not wound.

'You may. I have. Every idea.'

'But she doesn't want to marry you!'

They had halted. Meltrum looked down at the youth.

'Isn't that for her to say?'

'But she's only . . . Is she nineteen? And I mean . . .'

'You mean I'm over forty? You mean hasn't she plenty of time to wait? Well, I haven't. I'll wait two years and no longer. I'll see her through the University. She'll be twenty-one then.'

'You have no right. She . . . You're not engaged. And her mother is against it.'

'Is she?' He flicked the youth with his fingers on the back of the shoulder. 'I know what Mrs. O. is up to. I know Mrs. O. of old. You're being used, my boy. Think it over.'

He turned on the ball of his foot and walked off with assurance.

All that night, and through the early morning of Friday, the boy was seen hanging about the dance-hall. Around midnight a quarrel blew up between two locals over a catch of fish; a knife was drawn and one man was stabbed in the arm. Shortly after

that he saw Frances and Meltrum passing across the lighted hall and Meltrum was laughing heartily and Frances was smiling her bantering smile up at him. He persuaded one of the local fishermen to sell him his big jack-knife.

When morning broke he woke shivering under a ledge of rock, among dry sheep-droppings, his head thumping. All he could remember was that he had drunk poteen; then he had been standing under her window on the empty road; then he had looked out to sea where the sinking moon's procession of light floated into its dwindling arch.

Now the whole sea danced with sun. Gulls whirling over a herring-shoal argued with a hundred voices for her innocence. He swam naked into the waves and then went off to her hotel. The words that had so cruelly tormented him the night before began to thump again. 'Being used.' By whom? By how many of them? By her?

He hung about the hotel until he saw her come out. At once his misery geysered up at the sight of her beauty and he asked her immediately, outside the fuschia hedge:—

'Did Meltrum propose to you last night?'

'That's funny,' she laughed. 'Mammy asked me that very same question this morning.'

'But did he?' he cried.

'Certainly not. And if he did he'd have got his answer!'

In his relief he sobbed on her throat. She led him away down among the rocks where the pools were mirrors to the sky. There she comforted him so maternally that he confessed about the knife. She took it from him and threw it into a wave. They bought chocolate in the village-shop and a packet of biscuits and two bottles of lemonade, and stole off to one of the near islands for their last outing: his bus would leave at nine o'clock the next morning.

Out there, lost to the world, they talked dear, precious talk of which neither would ever remember a sentence. Her body was slim but she swam powerfully. As he watched her he noticed the familiar lilac dress on a rock beside him, and the grey suede shoes he had seen so often, and he realised that he never thought of her as wearing anything else but that frock and those shoes; he wondered how poor the O'Briens were. He loved her for her poverty.

They lay in the heat, seeing a million sparkles through their peering eyelashes. They had often kissed before; he had been aware of passion; now the touch of burning thigh to thigh smothered them with a knowledge they had not had before; their innocence suffered under that fire like the sea quivering under the sun. In the late afternoon, when the pools were mirrors again, they walked back, too choked to speak. Woodbine scented the country road.

He tried to see her again after dinner but Mrs. O'Brien swirled

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down on him in a torrent of lace. He held on for one instant to the sharp crag of one sentence:—

'You really must understand, child. One day Francie may marry Tony Meltrum.'

'She's not in love with him,' he moaned.

A waterfall of lace swept him from his crag.

'Young people's nonsense!'

He drowned in scent and disgust.

At one o'clock in the morning he was still mooching about her hotel. The moon was immense. In the back-kitchen the servant-girls, still full of energy, were having a bit of a fiddle-dance. Some of the guests had joined in; the back-bar was busy; only the fishermen slept. Unheeded, he went upstairs. One dim oil-lamp in the corridor lit a picture of the Sacred Heart. He saw the grey suede shoes; tapped; got no answer; tapped loudly, with fearful glances down the corridor, took a few paces away, and then he saw her door open and she came out. She was in her bare feet, with her red dressing gown about her and her hair hanging. Her back was to him. She walked down the corridor and tapped at a door. He rushed after her calling her name. At their feet he saw a pair of big brown and white shoes, punctured with little decorative holes. He came about and faced her just as Meltrum opened the door, stringing his fawny dressing-gown about him. Paul began to gabble but Meltrum pushed him away, with a quiet 'Shut up,' and took her by the arm and led her gently down the corridor.

She smiled up at him. He led her back to her room, still smiling at him. In her room he lifted her in his arms and laid her into her bed, and covered her. Her eyes closed at once. Then he came out and gripped the boy by the lapels and shook him fiercely:—

'What are you doing here at this hour of the morning?'

'I want to talk to her.'

Meltrum ran him down the corridor to the stairhead where he clung to the banisters, shouting over and over:—

'What was she doing at your door? At your door?'

Meltrum dragged him downstairs, still shouting, still clawing at each banister pillar. When guests began to gather above and below the two were in a rolling heap on the turn of the stairs. They were dragged apart. The boy was flung out of doors by the hotel-boots.

All that autumn she avoided him, never answered his letters, hurried past him if he tried to accost her. In October Johnny, who was a first-year student, was invited to her birthday dance, but she did not invite him. That night he stood deep in a doorway across the street looking up at the window-blinds. Music floated down to him as vaguely as the falling leaves. It began to mist a

finely sieved rain; so fine that he could not feel it on his palm, but only on his knuckles. In the church down near her terrace the sanctuary lamp wavered like a star. He noticed a man under the church window. A passing car lit his burly familiar figure. He was muffled. He walked passed the house, paused, glanced up and passed on. The youth remained there for an hour, and then wandered about the streets with the windblown hours from the city's clocks. Once again he saw Meltrum.

'Dear God!' he moaned. 'We are all walking in our sleep.'

In the New Year Angela and Frances together invited him, and this time they did not ask Johnny. She could not evade him for a whole night in her own house. He cornered her.

'Frances! What did I ever do to you?'

She stared impassively at him.

'Why didn't you answer my letters?'

'I hadn't anything to say.'

'Why did you invite Johnny three months ago and not me?'

'Mammy sent out the invitations.'

'You invited me to-night.'

'Angela sent out the cards.'

'What game are you all playing?'

'Will you excuse me please. Mammy is waiting for me.'

He left early. He came back to the house after an hour. As he passed a doorway he glimpsed his brother standing deep in its embrasure. He halted in another doorway far down. He looked across the street for Meltrum. He was hulked in the archway of the church.

He failed his examination that year. So did she.

3.

He went to the same village that summer. So did Johnny. They stayed in the hotel. The others were there again. As if by a kind of truce, or as if they were all worn out, or as if they all had decided on the same strategy, they all began to enjoy the holiday. Meltrum was especially kind to him, taking him up the mountains rough-shooting or out fishing; and as Johnny was not strong enough for these sports Mrs. O'Brien arranged little picnics between him and Frances; or Frances would, in her kindness, slowly walk with him on the level boglands, or go swimming with him; it was his only sport and he excelled in it. In the evenings they all played cards together.

Paul never went to bed until he had seen her blind go dark; and even then he would not sleep for hours and started up at every noise, such as the hotel-boots shuffling on his rounds or a late-comer past his room. After a week he managed to change his room so that his door was opposite hers.

That evening he thought he felt a constraint in Meltrum's

manner, and that night, about two o'clock, he started awake trembling all over to hear a soft tapping on his door. When he got to the door there was nobody there; but down the corridor a thread of light vanished and a door clicked. He thought that it was Meltrum's door, went down, knocked and opened it. Meltrum was in bed reading.

'Did you knock at my door?' he asked.

'No!' said Meltrum in astonishment.

The next morning he drew Mrs. O'Brien aside and asked her if Frances had ever walked in her sleep before. She laughed and admitted that when she was teeny she did once.

'Or was it twice? Oh, years and years ago! And wasn't it odd, just *that* once, last summer. Tired, no doubt. A thing of nothing! Lala! If mothers bothered about trifles like that . . . the poor mothers of the world . . .'

'Don't you feel that somebody should share her room with her?'

'It would only upset her. No, no, I've heard of dozens of children like that. It means nothing at all. Oh dear no! *Nothing* at all!'

But early next morning he again woke up to a knocking on his door; it was Mrs. O'Brien, in pigtails, her face gleaming with oil like a pale Indian, a chin-strap binding her jowls.

'Frances isn't in her room,' she whispered. 'Is she here?'

'Is she in Angela's?'

'Don't be a ninny. I tried there!'

'Wake up Meltrum!'

'No! No!'

'What are you afraid of?' he cried furiously.

He forced her to knock up Meltrum. He came out at once, in his dressing-gown, his torch in his hand, listened and said,

'We'll ask Johnny.'

The three rustled down to Johnny's door. Meltrum opened it as silently as a burglar. His lensed beam floated until it circled the bed. She was in a pale-green night-gown, sound asleep, her arm across Johnny's uncovered chest. He too slept peacefully. The mother struck down the torch. She trust the two out of the door and begged them 'as gentlemen' to go at once to their rooms.

In the morning Frances came down to breakfast smiling as happily as usual as she edged between the tables. When she came to lunch she was not smiling at all. She looked pale and ill. Neither she nor her mother nor Meltrum came to dinner. The next morning Mrs. O'Brien announced her daughter's engagement to Johnny Power.

For a whole day and two nights Paul was missing. The Guards searched everywhere for him. It was Meltrum who found him, unshaven and half-crazy, made him dead drunk in a pub, drove him back to the hotel and cleaned him in his sleep, then he drove him home. He was ill for a month.

Winter repeated winter with one difference. Meltrum married Angela, bought the O'Brien's house and went to live in it. Mrs. O'Brien and Frances had a flat upstairs.

4.

Johnny Power was already growing into a companionable young man, liked by men, for he had a witty tongue and drank his share, and more. People foresaw a brilliant career. He had one failing, he was obsessed by jealousy. He showed it whenever he gave a party (he loved giving parties; he would give them at Meltrum's invitation in Meltrum's house) he never once invited his brother; and in the middle of the fun Meltrum never failed to observe him going to the window and peering out, under pretence of looking at the weather.

It was April before Paul succeeded in cornering her where she could not escape him, alone on the avenue leading from the college. She wore a white waterproof coat and a green tam-o-shanter. Her fair hair, her poised head, her slim neck, her eyes blue as the sky made her an image of the season. She looked in front of her and tried to pass him, but he held her arm and shouted out with such passion that in fright she looked around for help. The college grounds were empty. She looked at him, and her face softened with pity and her voice became so sad he thought she would break into tears when she said:—

'What do you want with me?'

He led her down a side-path towards the river into the deserted lower grounds.

'Let go my arm, Paul.'

Water dripped through rocks. Far off they heard a cry from the tennis-grounds. A tram rattled outside on the public road. They descended to where the river, in its meanderings had made two islands, two green rafts dappled with yellow, and here they crossed to the first island.

'Frances, are you in love with Johnny?'

She turned her head aside. He gave a sob of relief, and cried triumphantly.

'Then you can't marry him!'

She shook her head like a dog come out of water.

'What is all this talk about marrying?'

'Have they been tormenting you?'

She waved her hand and head and said, 'Have they!'

She sank on the grass and with her head sheltered under her elbow-crook let it all pour out.

'They took me to a doctor. Mamma keeps advising me. He was a bloody old fool of a doctor. He gave me a book to read. I've been reading nothing but books . . .'

She babbled on and on. He felt her terror of a secret self

in herself trying to break out to herself. He put his arms about her and held her tight.

'If you love anybody you love *me*!'

She held him. For a long while they were quiet.

'Can we meet to-night?' he whispered.

'They're having a party,' she whispered.

'I'll watch all night,' he whispered. 'I'll watch till your light goes out.'

'There,' she whispered and pointed up across the islands through the poplars. 'With the red curtains. I'll signal three times. But the gates are closed at six?'

He laughed.

'There are six ways of getting in.'

She smiled.

'I know one way myself. When I'm late in the morning for a lecture, if the river is low, like now, I dodge across this way,' looking towards her back garden and the rustic bridge.

'That's the way I'll go home now—they'll be wondering where I was. Goodbye, Paul.'

They kissed madly. She went racing over the rustic bridge, and through the little island, and she waved back as she jumped down the far bank. He saw her green tam-o-shanter bob across the dry bed and vanish among the alders at her garden's end.

He returned into the grounds before the gates closed, carrying an overcoat, and lay in the high grass of the island, content to lie there all night if need be for her sake. The sun set at about a quarter to seven. The lights in her terrace were already yellow. After that his hour-glass was the trickle of water, the rumble of a tram, a scurry under the bank, the increasing brightness of the city's glow above the trees, the motion of the Easter moon.

*Oh April brings my love to life again
With daffodils, that secret trumpets blow . . .
The daffodils, that silent trumpets blow,
Now April leads my love to life again
With hair so gold, and budding breasts aglow . . .*

He had not heard a tram for a long time now. Few lights gleamed. The water was more loud. He shivered although the air was still. When two more lights vanished her's—Surely her's?—appeared high under the eaves. The red curtains stirred. He jumped up. He could not be sure if it was her figure between them. The window went black: it lit and blacked, it lit and blacked, and lit and blacked. No more. He gave such a sigh that he laughed at himself after. Then the curtains were drawn so that, in the moonlight, it was difficult to be sure if the room within was lighted.

He lay down and wrapped himself in his coat.

*Without my love, all's nothing! Midnight moon.
Nor city's glow, nor curtain-gleam . . .*

The river gurgled. The city beyond the walls was silent.

*Without my love, all's nothing. The moon's
Great lamp, a window-light, the city's glow
Upthrown. She walks into her room, and lo,
Her radiance floods the world . . .*

He stayed on.

O only love, O single light . . .

He searched her window for a word, and started to his knees. She was walking across the wooden bridge. She wore her long pale party-dress, cut low across the shoulders. Her hair hung down. He stumbled towards her and stopped. He took her hand and led her to his form in the grass, and there he drew his overcoat across her and took off his jacket and laid it over her shoulders, and then she slowly wrapped her arms about him and he held her in his. The mist began to sink upon them; he protected her with his body; his shirt gradually became soaked; he shivered constantly, but would not stir. At dawn she got to her feet and walked away over the bridge.

The next day he was in a fever. That night he came again. She walked across the bridge through the radiant mist, and lay there under the moon. This time, it was his own word, she looked funny in a belted pyjamas whose legs reached between her knees and her ankles. That night he had brought two coats and a big, black umbrella which he leaned over her head like a tent. It was soaked before morning. For the third night he came. He was now in a raging fever, and this time he drank complete happiness in her arms. He did not see her again. Three weeks later he was dead, of pneumonia.

By July she was with child. When the doctor told her she fainted; not, as he thought, from terror but because she could not understand it. Her mother blamed Johnny Power. He at once broke off the engagement. Then he came raging to Meltrum. Meltrum flung him out of his house. Nobody believed anybody. That was the position almost until the baby was born.

For the rest of the summer and all through the autumn she kept to her room. No matter how often her mother came there she would find her sitting by the window staring over the divided river and the islands; staring intently. The leaves fell; she watched their oblique tumble. There was a flurry of snow in December; she gazed at the whiteness of the matted islands. Then one December afternoon when Johnny was going through his brother's papers he came on an unfinished poem. He hurried with it to the Meltrum house and her mother, in pity, finally decided to give it to her. Standing by the window she read it again and again.

*Now April brings my love to life again
The daffodils their silent trumpets blow
For hair so gold and breasts whose budding glow
And softness like to snow makes all their beauty vain.*

*What's anything without my love? This moon's
Great lamp, yon window-light, the city's glow
Uphrown? She walks to her room, and lo
Her radiance floods the world. O love come soon . . .*

*More soft she comes and cool than Summer rain
Or yonder misted moon whose shadows throw
An inward light about, above, below,
And all my passions blow into a flame.*

O only love, O single light, dear womb . . .

When she read it for the fourth time she looked out at the misted islands and straightway burst into tears of happiness.

I met her in Padova where she and her daughter keep a *pensione*. She is still beautiful, so fair-skinned that she will not show her age for another decade; it is only when the light falls sideways on her face that one sees the fine wrinkles and the first cruel dragging of the skin of the neck. From hints and in scraps I put her story together, as when she was talking freely of her girlhood and I asked, 'Did you take a degree?' and looked at Pauline and said, with a smile, 'Pauline intervened.' Both what she said and her innocence in saying it was so surprising that I deflected the conversation lest she should observe my interest. How had she come to Italy? She had gone to England, first, to relatives, and then came to Milan as a governess. Later these kind Milanese asked her to bring out her daughter. Pauline married when she was twenty-two. Her husband had been killed fighting in Spain.

One day we got on somehow to sleep-walking and Pauline, with a wicked Italian grin said, 'I wouldn't be here if mamma hadn't walked in her sleep.' I looked at her mother in puzzlement, half-expecting to hear a reproof, and was startled to see her smiling pensively. Later I asked,

'Did your daughter ever walk in her sleep?'

'Once only,' she replied. 'When she was seventeen. We had gone up to the lakes with out Milanese for the summer. One night she walked into the garden and looked around. It was Maggiore. It was as bright as day under the moon. I did not disturb her. She remained standing there only for a few minutes. I was wondering what she was seeing, or expecting to see.'

I turned to Pauline.

'Did you know?' I asked her.

She laughed sadly.

'Al tempo de' dolci sospiri!' she sighed, and threw out her hands. 'Who knows anything at seventeen?'

KEVIN FALLER

BROTHER WIND

THE sky had been silent too long. Each day he had gone through the meaningless gestures of the prison routine, living only for a whisper of wind; each evening he had dreaded the approach of night.

There had been nine nights of silence. It was the afternoon of the tenth day and the sky still ignored him. He felt he had stood for ages on the edge of a precipice; wanting to fling himself forward, unable to turn back; waiting for the voice of the wind to move his will.

His fellow-prisoners and jailers, his rest and food, exercise and work—all seemed part of an uncertain memory; his own voice and body were becoming strangers to the thoughts in his mind.

He looked again at the sneering winter-glint of the late afternoon sky. It seemed to him a sky that would never tolerate the gentleness of a cloud, or the good nature of a breeze.

The light of day made bearable the silence of the sky; but in the darkness, when sleep gave a brief freedom to many weary minds, the silence amplified the voice that spoke to him out of the past.

He would hear her tell the lies that had deceived him. And when he had found her out—seemingly—in her deceptions and animal deeds, when he had accused her of desecrating so much that he held sacred, he would hear her answer his accusations with the one word yes.

She had said yes as though it might just as well have been no. A small word, it seemed, to start murder. But its very smallness made it memorable. It was fifteen years since she had spoken it, and the sound still carried to his ears. When the night was still, her voice and the last word it had spoken, and many another word spoken in good or bad faith, echoed from dusk to dawn, from brain to blood.

It no longer mattered whether or not the provocation she had presented so carelessly justified his insane anger, an anger that had demanded her immediate death. A jury had judged him guilty of the murder of his wife; but the death sentence had been deformed to one of life-imprisonment—probably, he had often thought with bitterness, because of his youth.

He had managed to adapt himself to imprisonment. As time unwound from his mind, he had been able to think less about the prison walls and more about the world beyond the walls of time; until now he was reminded of what had been, and what might have been, only by the memory of her voice.

That the night be loud with wind, shouting down her voice, was all he asked. But the wind did not merely obliterate her voice;

it seemed a benevolent presence, entering his cell and speaking to him personally, helping him to pass the nightly ordeal of darkness and solitude

Now, for nine nights, the wind had not spoken.

The afternoon paced slowly towards evening, and daylight shuffled away. All too soon the walls of his cell were forcing his sight in upon himself. Later, when all the cells were dark and he had stretched himself on his bunk, he saw the wedge of light from a lamp that hung in the prison-yard. The wedge rested on a corner of his small, barred window, and had often been the light that guided him from the monstrous territory of nightmare.

This night, so like so many nights, he played a game that had often given him respite: he returned to his childhood and entered memories of that time with the same abandonment that toys or pretences arouse in a child. But when his mind had tired he could not control such memories; then the voice, subdued by day, began to sound as though the lips that uttered it were close to his ears.

There was one thing he would never know for certain—if her answer to his accusations had been true or false; he would never know if his anger had been provoked by a lie, if she had suffered death for sins not hers.

It would have been in keeping with her indifference towards him to have lied to his gravest accusations; as it was in keeping with nature that love, when it could not play lover, should be moved to murder.

But such considerations had become bloodless by the time fifteen years had filtered through the bars of his cell. The most vital vision now was of her face, when he had first known it and it had seemed the face of an angel. Her face mocked all other images in his mind; and her lips told of all that might have been in contrast with the reality that confined him.

He lay on his back; the hardness of the bed was kinder to the flat of his back than to the contours of shoulder and hip. Lying there, it was impossible to believe that at one time he had not slept alone; that at one time he could have whispered in the darkness and heard a whisper answer—whether true or false.

And the wind, the only other thing that spoke to him now, was away. The lamp in the prison yard hung motionless; and the light that touched the edge of his window seemed less bright for its stillness. The many noises of a town ten miles away came to him as a low drone. It was about the hour, he thought, when cafes and cinemas, and other amusement-places, would be closing, and the people making for home.

The word home had a foreign sound in his mind; as though he were to hear the name of his country spoken in the accents of a foreigner. In her home she had been beaten to death. But when he had stumbled out of the house into the silence of the night, believing her dead, she had been alive. She had lived through the night. Early next day the moaning had brought a passer-by. The

same day she had died in hospital, making no statement, but prepared for death by a minister of her religion.

The prisoner opened his eyes in the darkness. He had come to think, rightly or wrongly, that though he had murdered her body he might have been the means of saving her soul. He was no longer certain if she had been as depraved as rumour had sworn; but it seemed likely that she would have so become.

This was a thought that would comfort him sometimes in happier moments. But in desolate moments he rebelled at the idea that his whole life should have been added to the price of her redemption; and in such moments his urge was to blaspheme and desecrate.

The silence of night gave him the most moments of desolation. In the silence, in the retching of his soul, he would feel himself damned. The thought of being damned was unbearable because he had no worldly gain to set against an other-worldly damnation. The present was bearable only while death promised an escape to a happier state.

The desolation of the damned distorted him now. He wanted to sling himself against the walls of the cell, fling blasphemies at his Creator, until his brains had been beaten out or his mind deformed for ever.

His fingers were pressing into the flesh of his breast, his heart rebounding from his hands. The only intelligent thought in his mind was a weak hope for wind; for the voice of the wind to smash the silence waiting like an evil presence until he had destroyed himself.

The only sound was the dying drone of the town. Soon the silence would have him to itself. It was time to turn on his side; the discomfort of that position might distract him a little from the torment within. He turned on his side facing the wall, and found his only distraction in the brief act of turning. He moved his head forward until the wall was cold against his forehead.

He forced himself to think of wind; not a wind visible in the stirring of leaf, in the moving of cloud or the gesture of a woman's hair; but a wind in darkness, that was a voice only and did not speak in human tones.

The voice of the wind spoke of things other than desire and hatred, murder and despair; and it did not speak, but sang. Its singing was a hymn to the unhuman, to life without thought or feeling, to an existence akin to his own.

Like most hymns the note that sustained it was one of exultation. It was a note that thrilled him; made him feel that the failure of his life would find its counterpoint in some triumph of death.

Thinking of the wind had tired his mind. He tried to go on remembering it but his thoughts would not follow; he twisted right round in the narrow bed, in the vault of the cell, and glimpsed the finger of light resting still on the window.

He found himself slipping into the most dangerous mood of all; the state of mind where he would begin to consider his chances of being set free before death had ended his sentence. He would begin to think of what he would do with that freedom; and then to hope for it; so that, for days afterwards, the ordinary prison routine would become a revelation of hell.

He closed his eyes tightly and murmured words that were half-prayer, half-blasphemy. He would remember the wind—the voice in the wilderness that had drawn him often from despair—the final despair in the depths of silent nights.

He said her name. She was safe in Almighty arms. Let her ask that the wind be flung upon the night; that he might hear the voice that did not speak in diverse tongues but only in the cry of the outcast: the cry that hated words and meanings for their chains of memory, and lived as a lonely sound and a will to survive.

A minute or perhaps an hour later as the eye of mind might glimpse a far-off scene, he heard the wind on the edge of silence.

He lay stiff, fearful of being mistaken, all awareness rushing to his hearing. He heard the wind launch itself at the silence like an avenging angel, and his mind rose to meet it. Then they were one, the wind and he, and the world echoed the hymn they sang.

In a little while, to see if he were dreaming, he opened his eyes and closed them again. He was not dreaming; he could still hear the wind. Even though he had seen the wedge of light on the window of the cell; even though the light had not moved, and the lamp outside hung motionless in the windless night, the wind sang within.

He smiled; as certain men smile when it has been proved to them that there is no God; men who have persevered till the miracle has been wrought: so that they need no proof of God or promise of His love, for they can hear His voice in their hearts when they can hear it in no other place.

He had hope; as they have hope who cannot even say if the voice in their hearts resembles the voice of man or angel—or merely the voice of the wind.

ANTHONY· CRONIN

CONSOLATION

Our Gaelic poets going about the west,
Blinded with rage or sorrow among
The sodden green hills and feeling
The destruction in the wind,
Knowing that poor men's pride is
Only a drunkard's boast,
And wanting a firelit hall
And a prince's head to be bowed
In acquiescence to the word;

They still must have rejoiced to find amid
The fall of fortunes and the banishments
That the careful also suffer with the gay,
In a time of trouble
Cute with the careless, having no guarantee
That next year money,
However carefully hoarded,
Would not by a stranger's
Or by history's hand be squandered.

GENTLEMAN BYRNE

BYRNE'S house was on the sea-front, one of the few houses on the front that was not a pub. He rose late. From his window he saw the harbour, some small boats lying there, and, to the right, the town. It was grey, save for the Seaview Hotel which was yellow and stood alone by the water's edge. The grey slate roofs of the houses sloped up to the mountains. Out from the harbour, over the Atlantic waters, was a rat-shaped island which, this morning, was obscured by misty rain. The rain drenched the town; it bespattered the grey waters of the harbour and made the brightly-painted boats pale with fright.

Byrne shaved over the basin alongside the window. He would willingly have cut his throat. Last night he had returned from Dublin by a late bus, taken four whiskeys, and lain awake all night. He had appeared on behalf of a local farmer charged with murder. The man had been found guilty but insane, a fact of little importance to Byrne beside the fact of his own crisis. He had not left this town for many years. Other visits to Dublin had made, for some reason, little impression on him. However on this one he had encountered classmates of twenty-five years ago who were now prosperous lawyers with homes and families and motor-cars; and he had seen himself in their eyes, had seen his town in the eyes of Dublin, and had returned, if it is possible, changed.

Byrne dressed. On account of his dress and his manners he was known as 'Gentleman Byrne.' He wore a white collar with rounded ends, displaying a red tie—dark red, for it had not been cleaned in seven years—which was held in a loose knot by a mother-of-pearl tie-pin. His suit was well-worn and it would wear for another thirty years. He put on a mackintosh and a pork-pie hat turned down all round, and took an umbrella and went out.

The sun was shining. It was the odd vivid light that follows after rain. Byrne knew the West of Ireland too well to be surprised at the change. For no reason he strolled to the harbour. On the pier a man wandered up.

"Mornin' Mr. Byrne," he said.

"Morning Kearney. Two boats in I see."

Two trawlers were lying by the distant island. There was a hotel there, and a row of grey houses.

"Yes," said Kearney, "two Spaniards. Himself is waiting for the ferry."

Byrne saw 'Himself', a Customs Officer, tall, stamping his feet.

"They'll have vino or whatever they call it," said Kearney.

"An ugly crowd, they'd steal anythin', and they'd ate anythin'. They go pickin' along the shore, eatin' all kinds o' dirty things."

Byrne saw Spain, clearly, for a moment, white in the sun.

There's nine hundred pair o' them on the coast, ruinin' the spawn. They've finished all their own. And we've no boats big enough. It's a shame all right."

'A shame', 'a shame'. It was an expression that Byrne had heard before. He said Good Luck and went up the front, wond-

ering as always at the number of women who were 'licensed to sell...' The town was shining wet. As he walked Byrne caught sight of a maid in white cap and apron at a top window: she held a pair of binoculars to her eyes and looked out to sea. Inexplicably and without pondering it, Byrne had the sensation that the girl would do this for ever.

In the wide main-street, backed by the mountains, Byrne discovered it was Fair Day. Farmers: talking, smoking, spitting, watching, waiting to sell. A row of carts and donkeys stood on either side of the street. Inside were heaps of piglets and glossy calves. Small black bullocks were everywhere.

Old men and laughing girls stood round a hawker who sold needles on wooden handles for mending shoes:—

"The youngest kid in the house can do it," he said, "and if yeh haven't a kid of your own, don't despair, God is good, leave me your name and address before I quit the town."

Further on two vans had drawn up. They displayed homespun suits, and overcoats for all seasons. The salesman held Byrne's gaze. He wore a padded suit and a flashy tie. Byrne caught himself thinking—'*There's* someone I could talk to.' But the man's tongue was native: a small old man tried on an overcoat and bought it for thirty shillings and the salesman said, "Yeh look grand. If she had yeh down at the bottom of the bed last night, she'll have yeh up on the pillow to-night."

Byrne turned away, and as he turned his heart leaped with fright. A klaxon had sounded behind his back. Byrne stood aside. Red, sleek, shining, slowly through the male crowd a car nosed its way. The driver was a big man wearing a cap; beside him—heavenly vision—was a woman, dark and soignée. They moved on, honking all the way, round a corner, and out of sight.

Byrne watched, amazed. Then, reasonably, and sadly, he thought—Tourists passing through. He went on towards Doran's Hotel. As he walked he was recognised. To the ladies—all women were ladies to Gentleman Byrne—he touched his hat. Women were scarce, though, on Fair Day. To everyone he was a figure to be respected, a distant figure. To-day, for once, this did *not* please him. Passing his office, his name on the window, he saw Neale, his apprentice, standing in the doorway chatting. The young man, seeing him, slipped inside. Byrne's visits to the office, except in this recent case, became constantly rarer as those to Doran's were more frequent: he lived, which meant drank, on the Firm's diminishing capital.

In the hall he paused. On the left, in the dining-room the maid Josie, who was seventeen, stood at the window looking out on the street.

"Lonely?" asked Byrne who had gentlemanly ideas about her.

She turned. Her pink cheeks blushed red. She twisted her head away and said bitterly,

"Lonely is it!"

Byrne felt ashamed: he had jested. Searching for something to say, he looked blankly at the check table-cloths, at the bottles of

IRISH WRITING

H.B. and T.D. Sauce and the silver tureen on the side-board.

"Be seeing you," he said. (For he lunched with the Manager of the Provincial Bank and Doherty of Doherty's)

The bar was a lounge bar, an innovation for the summer-tourists. Byrne sat at one end of the counter. In the centre were two commercials, and at the other end Fred Phillips, who was caretaker of a 12th Century Church up the hill. Mrs. Steele, proprietress, was behind the bar. She had a long nose and kept her arms crossed over her chest. To-day, Byrne noted, she was excited, and was cold to Byrne. This was odd: ordinarily they were both anxious to please.

The commercials reminisced. They talked of one Barney Nolan who was described as a 'queer bloody Card,' and who had "given up the Road, and taken over Maintainence in the bloody Circus."

Duffy's, said Byrne to himself, poor old Duffy's—though why his beloved Circus had become 'poor old Duffy's, he could not say.

Fred Phillips was talking to Mrs. Steele. His conversation, too, could always be foreseen. Poor Fred, nationality, religion, ideas, all wrong, only the accent Irish. Stationed here before the First War he had returned, unwisely, afterwards. As caretaker he had what was considered a good house: there was no water, and no water-closet. He listened to the B.B.C.: he was a Liverpool man. The statement to which he was most attached—(he made it now)—was "They come for the ould bucket twice a week!"

Byrne was glancing through the pages of the Visitors' Book on the bar. Last year visitors had come from Oxted, and Charterhouse and Buffalo. They had had 'no money left'. They were 'very comfortable'. They and others, wrote:—"God's own country," 'Wooing my best,' 'Drink up U.S.A.' 'Smashing service,' and 'The ship's name is Murphy and it's not so bad.' Byrne read on, confusedly. 'Here?' he was asking himself. 'Here?' Yes, here. He saw the piano being beaten into life, saw the empty glasses, the cigarette-butts and the dirty playing-cards, heard the sentimental-rowdy songs and the coarse jokes, and saw it raining—raining everywhere, but mostly on the sea-front. He began to read again; at which moment the stranger came in.

He was the man whom Byrne had seen driving the red car, a big man in a well-cut tweed suit. His manner was lively and confident. 'My type' was Byrne's reaction.

"Good morning," said the stranger to the company.

"Good morning," they mumbled.

The stranger seemed to have a foreign accent. This was confirmed, for he said,

"You are Mrs. Steele? I am Monsieur Chastenet."

They shook hands over the bar. This was clearly a prearranged meeting.

"Very glad to meet you, Messewer," she replied. She made no introductions.

"You have my wine?" asked M. Chastenet.

"Surely," she said. "Would you come inside?"

She raised the counter-flap and led him into the inner room. A moment later he came out with a box loaded with wine-bottles and went outside.

"*Could* someone give this gentleman a hand?"

She meant to say it reprovingly, but it came out beseechingly. Byrne was into the inner room at once. Mrs. Steele pointed out a box and Byrne lifted it to his stomach and staggered out. 'The old miser!' he was thinking, 'there should be a boy to do this.' Thus, begrudging his good fortune and calming his growing excitement, he came out into the street. The day was hot now. The red car lay at the door. The angel was sitting in it. M. Chastenet came round, took the box and put it in the back. After profuse thanks he attempted an introduction:

"Excuse me. Your name?"

"Byrne."

"Mister Byrne. Madame Vaugirard."

They shook hands through the window. Madame had a wonderful smile.

"Byrne!" exclaimed Chastenet. "You must be Martin Byrne, Solicitor!"

"Yes I am."

"Excellent. The very man! I have some business I want to discuss with you. Come to lunch?"

"Well, I'm much obliged, when...?"

"Now. I'll leave you back."

"Well....."

"Come." Byrne was bundled into the back of the car. He sat with the red wine. He was now in the hands of Providence. They went hooting down the main-street. But it was embarrassing: familiar faces staring in at the windows. Byrne heard the voice of the hawker, who was now surrounded by children. "Mind yourself George," he said to one small boy, "or your mother'll be down to me to replace you." Byrne was ashamed. He fixed his eyes on the back of Madame's hat, black with a curling feather. The Fair was tragic. By evening, he thought, there'll be nothing of this but dung and straw on the road.

They turned into another street and went towards the mountains. Suddenly Madame exclaimed,

"Look André—these beautiful windows. They are the perfect Georgian!"

"That's Doherty's," said Byrne, "one of the old firms."

"Really," said Madame, "and look André—an exquisite Queen Anne house!"

"Oh that's Doctor O'Brien's," said Byrne who was beginning to feel at ease.

"Ah, Mister Byrne, how I adore your little villages!" said Madame.

Byrne was silent.

M. Chastenet drove at a terrifying speed out of the town. As they left and went corkscrew-wise up the mountains Byrne caught a word from a tattered pink poster, 'Carnival.' It went with

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him all the way. At the top they looked down on the town for a moment, now in the brightest sunshine. The sea was blue. Amid the grey curve of the town was the Seaview Hotel. Even in sunshine Byrne saw it as incomparably dismal. They were swept into the mountain-valley and Madame said farewell with,

"Charming!"

They were silent; Byrne in terror, for M. Chastenet drove like a madman. They passed the ruin of the English Barracks where poor Fred Phillips had been stationed, and the ruin of a castle, and a fort, and ruins and more ruins.

"You know," said Madame Vaugirard, "you have your history with you always."

"Yes," said Byrne.

"I can see it even in the people. I cannot explain. I see it in their faces, somehow, a sense of the past."

"Yes," said Byrne, remembering the face he had shaved that morning.

They were silent again, travelling rocket-like through the countryside. Byrne took deep breaths of Madame's perfume. It anaesthetised his fear. When he looked out of the back window he could see merely dust. On either side were stone walls and heather, but as they went downhill again these turned to grass, to trees and hedges, and all at once a wide plain lay before them, which dispersed itself into a myriad small fields. M. Chastenet spoke for the first time,

"I should have explained, Mr. Byrne, in case you haven't heard. I am the new owner of Randalstown."

Byrne sat forward. This was news! The house, ramshackle, almost a ruin, had belonged to an old friend of Byrne's, Peter Fallon. Often, when Peter had a car, Byrne had been a visitor. Latterly Peter had not prospered. He had become bankrupt, taken to drink and died of a stroke. Byrne wondered at this news: no one told him anything any more; he was a lonely soul!

"You don't tell me! I know it well."

"Starting a Stud Farm, you know. Great land. But there has been much work to do."

"I can imagine it," said Byrne.

"Yes. So I am hoping that you will assist me out of my legal troubles."

"Surely," said Byrne.

They drove between high walls. Behind these, great houses and estates survived as ghosts, as reminders of the unrepeatable Past. Then at one of the high gateways they stopped and turned in.

The Randalstown drive was a beauty. Vast, umbrella-shaped trees stood about in the front fields. Circling past them, the car turned the final sweep and came in sight of the house which was what Mme. Vaugirard would call "the perfect Georgian." To Byrne's astonishment it was not grey and peeling, a semi-ruin, but bright pink, with door and window-frames shining white. For a moment he did not recognise it, but then he knew that it was

poor old Peter's house, transformed.

A man in a white coat came to take in the wine and the other parcels from town.

"Come," said Chastenet.

They went through the hall. The walls were light blue and adorned with white medallions of great elegance. Upstairs, in a sitting-room with an Adam ceiling, a tall man rose from the sofa which lay before the blazing log fire. His face was tanned: he had just returned from China.

"M. Nogrette. Mister Byrne." Chastenet handed them large glasses of gin-and-French and said,

"Sit down everybody."

Byrne was looking at the mantelpiece upon which signed photographs of women of astonishing beauty, each one different, were interspersed with photographs of horses, also of great beauty. Byrne, impressed, careless, drank deeply, though to him gin-and-French was the nearest thing to Poison.

"Well," said Nogrette, "how was the Big City?"

"Charming, as ever," said Mme. Vaugirard. "We have brought back a hostage."

"Ah, you're one of the city-dwellers, Mr. Byrne," said Nogrette. "Friend André here—he is the country type. We are all flown here from Paris, you see, to look at the New Marvel."

"I see," said Byrne.

"Yes," went on Nogrette, "and the horses are flown from Paris too. In future when you come to Randalstown you shall come with Passport and Visa."

"I am not French," said Chastenet, evidently in anger. "I am Swiss!"

"Pardon," said Nogrette.

"This house, Mr. Byrne," said Mme. Vaugirard, "you must see it. It is not a house any more. It is a hospital. You shall see my bedroom. When the maid brings my breakfast in the morning I wonder—why does she not wear a mask?"

Byrne sat back in his chair, allowing the conversation to flow past him. For his sake, presumably, they spoke English: it was unnecessary. Strange to say, he was becoming intoxicated, and this was something which he had not experienced for many years.

A gong sounded. As they went into the dining-room another person appeared. This was an American girl of twenty. Her hair was cut short at the back and combed in a fringe on her forehead. She wore an old suit, and bobby-socks and slippers. She looked pale and angry. "How do you do?" she said. She had a strong American accent.

The girl's name was Serina Vane. She and Byrne sat facing Mme. Vaugirard and Nogrette, while Chastenet, beaming at every insult, sat at the head of the table. In the centre was a Gold Cup which he had been awarded at an International Horse Show in Berlin.

'My company' thought Byrne; and for a moment he remembered Dublin: he and the other distinguished lawyers at lunch in the

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Four Courts, and at dinner in the Dolphin; the City Life; O'Connell Street at night; newspaper-boys crying "Heggal or Mail!" Leopardstown Races on the Saturday; his lady-friend in the Shelbourne Rooms. He had been with his own sort; and now it was happening again. Resisting the temptation to ask for a large Irish, Byrne watched his glass filling with white wine, watched the white sleeve of the butler move round the table and away to the sideboard where he stood beside.....heaven above, surely it was Mrs. Dring's little girl, dressed as a maid and serving at table! Mrs. Dring's daughter grown up into a plump woman. She was looking at him. Byrne at once looked into his glass. Miss Vane was speaking to him:

"Well I must say it's good to meet an Irishman at last! We've been kept in quarantine here, you know. Might as well have stayed in the Quartier Latin. I hope you've as strong a hatred for the English Race as I have?"

"I'm afraid I....."

"Sure you have," she said, "I can see it in your face."

Chastenet heard this. "Now then, our little Jeanne d'Arc," he said, "let's have some peace."

"Peace, peace, God! damn your peace!" said Miss Vane. "You're a fine one to talk of peace, you and your three wars."

"That's over now," said Chastenet seriously. "You know what this pretty girl wants to do, Byrne? Get herself into an Arab prison with the Palestine Jews. She's a writer, you see."

"And why not?" asked Miss Vane. "What's the good of all this damn peace here? Look at you—getting fat and going to seed."

"She's right," said Nogrette. "One must be where the world is alive and kicking. Soon Reuter will send me to the Balkans and when I'm there I'll think of you, poor old André, here with your horses."

"You may think what you like old man," declared Chastenet laughing.

They passed from fish to red roast beef, and from white to red wine. Byrne's head was swirling. No one else appeared to be affected, though the conversation was extremely loud: whenever Chastenet laughed Byrne's head reverberated with the thunderous sound. Consideration of the wine made him think for a moment of Mrs. Steele and of his deposition as First Customer. Although totally bewildered by the conversation he decided that he must take some part, and so he leaned forward and began—

"Well I've just been up in Dub..." but so feebly that Mme. Vaugirard innocently overcame him with,

"André's right. We want Simplicity again. We know too much. There is nothing to seek now but Simplicity, no frame to hold us but this, the country. We break out of all others. But you can't deny this, that there is land to till and cows to be milked, and that the sun will rise and set."

"Yes," said Byrne, "yes, yes, she's right." The woman was a—marvel! Imagine her milking cows!

"Quite right. At your age, of course, you need war," said Chastenet. "It is an experience which is part of Growing-up; one

must have it. These people who think to remove such a natural phenomenon are crazy!"

"This other is so *dull*," said Miss Vane.

"Exactly," agreed Nogrette.

"And sad," said Miss Vane. "There's a hopelessness about this. You can see the people drinking and dreaming their lives away."

This brought silence, then liqueurs and coffee, which they carried into the drawing-room.

Nogrette produced a fiddle. Sitting at the fireside he began to play. Surprisingly he played "She is far from the land". Tears came into Byrne's eyes. He went to one of the windows. It overlooked the fields at the back of the house—fields and hedges, no trees, none of the refinement of the front. In the nearest field was the ruin of an ancient chapel covered in ivy. The warm notes of the violin affected Byrne deeply. The sun was sinking: it was late afternoon and the month was March. Melancholy light played on the green landscape. Unnoticed by Byrne, Mme. Vaugirard came to stand beside him.

"It's like a Corot," she said.

"Yes," said Byrne.

"You know," she went on through the music, "I claim we have really found something here—simplicity, the mystery of simplicity, here as nowhere else."

"Yes," said Byrne. He was remembering the morning: Kearney on the pier, the two Spaniards, the men of the Fair, Doran's...

The music stopped.

"Would you like me to fetch the poem I wrote this morning?" asked Miss Vane.

"No," said Chastenet abruptly, "no, my dear. I want now to see how Mr. Byrne likes the look of my stables."

"Very well," said Miss Vane, who clearly did not mean it.

"Come," said Chastenet, taking Byrne by the arm. Byrne had begun to be irritated by the man's military manner. There seemed little likelihood now of Business, or even of getting home. However he went obediently downstairs, where the party reassembled in the hall and stepped out together into the twilight.

Everyone came. In spite of disagreements a curious unanimity bound them. There was a sense of shared adventure; as if there was something particular about this day. Byrne felt himself responsible: but this was an inexplicable, perhaps alcoholic, impression. Whatever the reason was, they tramped out to the farm-yard stables to see what they all, except Byrne, had already seen many times.

Mme. Vaugirard wore an extravagant fur coat. Miss Vane wore gum-boots and scarf. Nogrette, but not Chastenet, had an overcoat, and Byrne his mackintosh and hat. Chastenet and Madame walked ahead, arm in arm. It was almost dark.

At the stable-door they talked to an elderly bent man whom Byrne recognised as having been there with Peter Fallon.

"Glad to see you sorr," said the man. "You'll find the old

place a bit changed."

"I do, indeed," said Byrne. There was a glint in the man's eyes. Whether it indicated sarcasm, contempt or merely amusement, Byrne could not tell.

"Wouldn't mind talking to him alone", said Byrne to himself.

Inside Chastenet switched on the light. The stable was as clean as a drawing-room. It smelt strongly of pitch. A young man was brushing down one of the horses and Chastenet talked to him. Mme. Vaugirard read out the names and ancestry of the horses from the docketts which were nailed to each door.

"This, you see, Mr. Byrne," she said, "is the real house. Here I could live in comfort. He is not interested, you understand, in human-beings. Horses are his love."

I see," said Byrne, who saw less as the day went on.

"Come," said Chastenet. "We shall have some amusement. We shall have a blaze, Mr. Byrne, a real blaze."

"Good," said Nogrette, "so you're going to do it?"

"Of course," said Chastenet, as he led them into the yard. "What is the good of a ruin if you can't see it."

"Oh André, it's so beautiful as it is, so real," said Mme. Vaugirard. "You can't destroy what belongs. Besides, it's so paintable. I was going to paint it just as it is."

"Too bad my dear," said Chastenet. "Everyone please take some straw."

In the semi-darkness they bent and gathered armfuls of straw. Chastenet, from a corner of a barn, appeared with a heap of newspapers. Byrne grasped the sweet-smelling bundle to his mackintosh. He had no idea what they were doing. •

"If there's one thing in the world I hate," said Chastenet, "it's ivy. Vile, creeping, infested stuff. You'll see. We shall have an excellent little ruin in the morning. Then you can paint it, my dear."

"Yes, yes," said Miss Vane, who had not spoken till now because she was gathering straw with something like passion. "Let's burn this sorrow and disillusion and death in life. Let's burn it all away."

"Come," said Chastenet, and he led them out of the yard and into the neighbouring field.

Byrne walked beside Nogrette, stumbling in the darkness. He had just understood.

"Is he going to burn the ruin?" he asked breathlessly.

"No," replied Nogrette, as he strode forward, "the ivy."

They stopped before the dark shape in the midst of the field.

"I think you're too late," said Mme. Vaugirard, "the dew is falling."

"Not at all, not at all," said Chastenet, "the sun has been very warm all day."

"You can feel it," said Miss Vane, pulling roughly at the ivy. "It's dry as a bone."

They heard, but could barely see each other. Chastenet took the straw from each of them, and while he was arranging it where

the ivy was thickest they stood waiting. It was a beautiful evening, still, warm for March. The sky was dark, starless. Byrne, taken unawares by this latest madness, stood a little apart. When Chastenet lit the first match he watched intently. It went out. Another was lit, and then the flame grew, crackled, grew still more, and suddenly the straw flared up.

"Better stand back a bit when she get's going," said Chastenet. They moved a little. They watched. The ivy was dry. A sudden flash of fire ran right up the side of the ruin. They were illumined where they stood. They stepped back.

"Well done André," said Nogrette.

"There she goes," said Miss Vane with a tremour in her voice.

"There goes my painting," said Mme. Vaugirard, but she was unable to disguise her excitement.

The ruin was high, and the ivy had grown across the spaces between the tall, spare pillars. In these intervening spaces it was thick, hanging in festoons. These now gradually burst into flame, so that very soon there was a sheet of fire before their eyes. For miles around a red light must have been visible in the sky, and the assumption was surely widespread that Randalstown itself was ablaze. The group of delighted spectators stood back, Byrne still a little apart. Clumps of blazing, glowing ivy dropped continually down on the ground where they had stood before, and burnt leaves and ashes fell on their heads like snow.

Byrne stood, bewildered, in the light of the flames, hearing now and then a "Bravo!" and other exclamations from his companions. These were in French. They were evidently in no mood now for the formalities of English. Byrne heard a murmuring of voices nearby. He turned. To his surprise he saw that a small group had assembled some paces away. In the centre was Peter Fallon's old man. Beside him were three younger men—two stable-hands and the butler. A little behind the men were Mrs. Dring's daughter and another girl who stood holding each other round the waist. The next thing that Byrne noticed was the expression on their faces. They were awestruck. The girls were evidently too confused to express any attitude at all. They stared open-eyed. The young men showed not only awe, but something approaching anger; whereas the old man's face was something that Byrne would never forget. His cadaverous appearance exaggerated by the light from the blaze, unblinking, his lips moving, perhaps in prayer, perhaps merely in shocked communion with himself, he was to Byrne, a figure of terrible significance.

As Byrne watched them a surge of fellow-feeling came over him, dispelling at once his bewildered uncertainty. He saw one of the younger men, without touching his cap, without any gesture of respect, nod his head in greeting and then look back at the fire. Byrne walked over through the wet grass and without a word joined the group who, in turn, made no acknowledgement of his arrival. Cries of delight continued to come from the other party, while Byrne and his new companions watched in silence the tongues of flame licking the white stone black and sending a vaporous, dusky pillar of smoke and ashes high up into the night sky.

SEAMUS O'NEILL

THE PIGEON

SHE was already awake when oul' Larry, the knocker-up, rapped as usual, at half past five. Nowadays she was nearly always awake when he came. There was a time when his knock would rouse her from a deep slumber, but old people sleep less and less. She put out her hand and lit the candle. The weak, yellow light flickered uncertainly on the bare walls. She reached for her clothes—spread for extra warmth on her feet—and dressed. Her husband snored beside her. Although her movements jolted him he slept on. She knew that nothing she would do would awaken him. Half the time he pretended to be asleep for fear she might say something bitter about him being idle. To be sure it wasn't altogether his fault because thousands of men were out of work, but Robert was lazy. Long ago he had stopped looking for work and to make matters worse he drank, when he could get it. With what she earned at the Mill she had to keep them both. Small wonder she was getting tired of it. For thirty eight years now, she had been working at the Mill. She was only seventeen when the Mill at Templepatrick closed and they moved to Belfast. In all that time the only rest she had got had been when John was born. He only lived a fortnight and she had spent six weeks in the hospital. She always spoke of this, her only child, as if he still lived. "The time John was born," she would say, and somehow it seemed to her that he was always close to her, although she could not see or touch him. It was as though he were a patient little boy waiting for his mother to come home from the Mill. It was this feeling that made life bearable for her, and helped her to put up with Robert. She went into the kitchen to get some food ready. She put the kettle on the gas-ring and took from a shelf a loaf and some butter wrapped in paper and a tin of milk. Bread and tea was her morning meal, except on Sunday when they had black pudding and sometimes a piece of fat bacon. As she lifted the kettle from the ring she heard a sound. She thought it was the hissing of the kettle, but a lump of soot fell in the grate and she heard the noise again.

"It's a bird," she murmured to herself. She brought over the candle to the fireplace and peered up the chimney. It was a pigeon. The bird was frightened and it knocked down more soot as she caught hold of it by one red leg. It was a young one, and one wing hung limply.

"You're a pretty thing," she said. "And it's a great pity your wing is broken."

She placed the pigeon on the floor, wet the tea and poured herself a cup and when she looked around the pigeon was trying

to huddle into a corner, but one wing was spread out like a fan. She sipped her tea, and then went over to scatter some crumbs beside it. It tried to fly up the wall, but fell.

Margaret returned to the table, and watched the pigeon while she finished her breakfast. It did not touch the crumbs or even move.

After breakfast she went out into the yard and returned with an old box into which she put the bird. Then she went back to the bedroom.

"A young pigeon with a broken wing fell down the chimney," said she—"and on your life don't let it out on the street until I come home. If it gets out it'll be torn to pieces by a cat or a dog. I suppose you can see to that much? Are you listening to me?"

"I am," said the voice from under the clothes.

"If you let it out it will be the worse for you, you lazy lump," said she. "I must go now."

She did not come home at midday, because they only had a half-hour. She went out and bought sixpence worth of Indian Corn.

As soon as ever she got home she ran to the box. The pigeon wasn't there. She turned fiercely on Robert who was reading a Sunday paper through a spectacle, from which one glass was missing. "You let it go on purpose," she said. "I did not. It's below in the room," he replied. She found it on the floor behind the door.

"The creature—isn't it pretty and aren't its feathers grand in the gas light?"

"'Tis a street hoker," said Robert.

"That's like something you'd say, but you don't know anything about pigeons. You wouldn't recognise one from a crow."

"I would. I kept pigeons when I was a lad."

"I'll be bound you didn't keep them for long."

She got two matches and held ~~them~~ on either side of the broken wing. Then she bound thread round and round them and tied them with the long deft fingers of a spinner. When she had finished, she put the bird back in the box and put some corn and a saucer of water beside it. She prepared tea for Robert and herself. While they were eating she pointed, whispering—"Look, it's drinking the water."

Next Sunday she told Robert that they would have their dinner early because she wanted to go to Greencastle.

"In Heaven's name, woman, what would bring anyone down there in the middle of March? Have you lost your wits?" said Robert.

"Shut your mouth, you can stay behind if you like, but devil a penny will you get from me to spend on drink. Remember that."

He agreed to go with her and she gave him a shilling for the tram fares before they left the house. It was a cold journey.

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There were very few passengers on the tram and hardly anyone to be seen on the streets. York Street seemed to stretch into a bleak eternity of steel-grey set-stones and red brick mills. "I'm perished already. I'm sorry I didn't stay at home," said Robert.

"The fresh air will do you good," she answered.

Robert didn't speak again until they reached the terminus. "You're surely not going down to the sea to-day?"

"Come on. The walk will warm you."

They set off through the main street of Greencastle and when they had walked about a mile Robert spoke again. "Will you tell me in God's name where you are going woman?"

"Come on now. We have only another mile to go."

"God help us, you're mad."

They reached Whitehouse and she turned down a lane leading to the sea. Robert halted. "Do you think I am going down to the shore to-day when there is a bitter wind in from the sea that would skin a donkey?"

"Stay where you are then, you lazy lump, if you want to. To be sure it must be hard for anyone who spends day and night in bed to face down to the sea to-day."

He followed her. A woman came to the door of a house to stare at them passing.

"No wonder people are looking at us," he muttered. They went on under the railway bridge, out on to the strand.

The tide was out. In a short while they came to a bank of fine, clean sand. "This will do," she said.

She took a linen bag she had made during the week, from her pocket and filled it, while Robert looked silently on.

"You wouldn't get nice clean sand like this in Greencastle. It is too near the City."

She stood up and looked around. Up at the top of the Lough the gantries and the cranes of the shipyards were just visible through the smoke that screens Belfast like the fantastic trees of a dream. On the other side of the Lough, facing them, lay Hollywood, where there was the soldiers' barracks. "That's Hollywood over there. Many's the fine Sunday evening Isobel and myself spent there when we were young. 'Twas grand listening to the soldiers singing, as they sat on the sea-wall. I hear that they don't sing nowadays at all." She looked down the bay. "Bangor is down there, but you can't see it and on this side there's Whitehead. Ough, Whitehead!"

Their father used to take them there an odd Sunday when they were children and lived in Templepatrick. She did not want to remember those childhood days now. There were only three of the family left. Michael over in England, Willie in America and herself here. She was lonely. Out in the deep Channel big white waves wrestled with the wind.

She turned to Robert. "We'll go home now."

As they passed back through Greencastle the public houses

were open. "A half one will warm us. I feel perished myself now." She handed him a halfcrown, and they went in. When they got home she spread some of the sand on the bottom of the box for the pigeon.

The bird got better and became a great pet with Margaret. She cared for it, as she would for a child but she knew she would have to let it go soon.

"Will it come back, do you think, if I let it out?"

"It'll go off with the first flock of pigeons it sees."

"If we had another, to make a pair?"

"Two wouldn't stay either. You'd need a whole loftful."

After Mass the following Sunday she took the pigeon and went out to the yard. Robert followed. "Isn't it well improved? Look at the nice red feathers it has and how bright its eyes are. Feel how soft it is," she said.

She rubbed her cheek against its silky breast. Then she opened her hands wide. As if surprised, the bird remained motionless for a second, then it spread out its wings and flew to the top of the wall. It strutted up and down, then suddenly soared into the sky. "That's the last you'll see of it," said Robert.

"St. Anthony will send it back to me."

That evening while they were at tea Robert said, "Didn't I tell you it wouldn't come back? You can't keep just one."

"You don't know anything about pigeons."

"The bird didn't come back."

"It might come yet."

He did not reply and just as she was getting up from the table the pigeon alighted on the window sill.

"Didn't I say St. Anthony would send it back to me?" She ran out to the yard. For a while the bird wouldn't let her catch hold of him, but in the end he submitted. She carried it triumphantly into the kitchen.

Their neighbour, Hughie Broderick, came in about an hour later. "I heard this evening that there's a new ship to be built; if we go down in the morning, we might get started. They say they'll need a lot of men."

"'Tis the pigeon brought luck to the house," said Margaret.

"I always heard that pigeons bring ill-luck," said Robert.

"That's like something you'd say."

"That's not at all a bad-looking bird," said Hughie. "Anyone of them might find it hard to beat him in a race. What do you keep him for?"

"He's a pet of my own," said Margaret.

"I see. Well, he's a fine bird. He's worth a few bob. I'd better be off. Good night to you."

"Didn't I tell you he was a good pigeon," said she.

"Ah, what does he know about them?"

"It's easy to know it's a good breed. Look at the way its

feathers are shining. You'd better look round the house for your dungarees. You'll need them in the morning. I'm sure you'll get work. It was St. Anthony sent me back the pigeon."

"Stop talking rubbish."

Robert didn't get work. There were throngs of men around the office and only about a third of them were taken on. He returned to the house about eleven o'clock in the morning and made himself some tea.

"Her and St. Anthony—and the pigeon! What'll she say now about St. Anthony?" he said to himself. He himself wasn't expecting work, but he dreaded the abuse Margaret would give him that evening. It wasn't his fault he didn't get work. "Herself and St. Anthony and the pigeon." He looked over at the pigeon on the hearth. Hatred was rising in him for that bird. Only St. Anthony had sent it back, she wouldn't be expecting him to get work. She wouldn't have paid any attention to Hughie Broderick. He looked at the pigeon again. A few shillings: He'd get more than that much for a bird like that. He put on his coat.

When Margaret came home that evening Robert wasn't sitting at the fire as usual. The grate was empty.

"He must have been taken on," she thought.

She lit the gas and when she noticed that the pigeon's box was empty she became uneasy.

"He must be above in the room." But the pigeon wasn't there, or anywhere else in the house.

Hughie brought Robert home that night. He was singing. As soon as she saw him Margaret knew what had happened to her pigeon. But she didn't scold him. She just sat down at the table, put her head between her arms and wept.

ERIC CROSS

SILENCE IS GOLDEN

“DON'T be quoting proverbs at me,” warned Jeremiah, with a threatening thrust of his pipe stem. “There's no sense to them.”

“I wouldn't expect you to recognise sense,” snapped back Snucky Sugrue.

“They contradict each other and there can't be sense in contradictions,” re-asserted Jeremiah.

“Tell me one so and I'll prove that you are wrong for a wager of a pint.”

“Alright, I will, Mr. Knowall.” Jeremiah searched his mind for a moment . . . “‘Silence is golden’—there's one for you, who spend the night talking.”

Snucky drained his glass and loosed his imagination from its leash. “I'll educate you now, Jeremiah, out of the depths of your ignorance by telling you how a simple man raised himself from a labouring life to ease and comfort by believing in proverbs and proving that silence is golden.”

“Years back, there was a man by the name of Jim Brady. He had a job in the blasting gang on a relief work for building election roads. But one day Jim didn't manage to make the gateway when the fuse was fired. He stumbled, and when we looked round from the cover, Jim was just getting back to his feet when the shot went off, and when the stones and the dust had settled, Jim was lying where he fell—dead.

We put him on a hurdle and carried him home and told the old women to prepare him for the wake. That night we waked him like a king. We had porter and whiskey by the gallon—and it was in the days when there was real whiskey in the world. We said all the good that we could remember about him and then, when we had eased our consciences, we spoke the truth about him. All the time Brady lay there without a sound. Neither the talk nor the smell of the whiskey knocked a stir out of him. Remember that, now, Jeremiah. Remember that.

The night and the company wore away until there were only three or four left who had got into a tangle of an argument and had either to settle it or fight before they could break up. They were hard and hot at the litigation when there was a sigh from the wake table and—Brady sat up. Then, without saying a word, he got up, put his two feet on the floor and stood there, just as he was.

The company took to their heels and ran like hell out of the house with the height of fright they got. Brady turned up to the job the following morning with nothing more wrong with him than a cut on his head and the loss of his speech. The gang were in a

bit of a fix. They didn't want to be advertising themselves as a class who spent money, waking a man when he wasn't dead. They asked Brady himself about it and how it felt to be dead and had he any news of heaven or hell for them. But Brady hadn't a word—yes or no. They were entitled to believe their own eyes that all through the night there hadn't been a stir out of him while the whiskey was about him in lashings. That surely was test enough. Brady must have been dead so.

Brady, then and after, said nothing, but he did a lot—and just as important—there was a lot of things he didn't do. Brady, you see, was an intelligent man who believed in proverbs and knew that actions speak louder than words.

Now all this happened about the time for the planting of the spuds. There had been a contention in the parish for years about drills and ridges and Jim Brady had always been the leader of the faction that believed in ridges. He would not hear a word in favour of drills. But when he started on his own spuds, after coming back from the dead, he straightaway planted in drills. That only made it all the more certain that he had come back from the dead and it had needed the death to convert him, for he was an obstinate class of a man. Of course, every man in the parish followed suit. You couldn't blame them for who were they to be making right and wrong with a man who had come back from the dead.

A few years before this happened there was an ould hake of a spinster woman died and in her will she left a cottage and a tidy bit of land and a good weekly wage to be given freely and entirely and for life to a man who was this and who was that and who was all that an ould hake of a spinster might fancy a man to be. But there was no man in the parish or in any parish had such qualifications, for if there ever was such a man he would never have been let out of heaven. And all that the man had to do for it all was to keep the hedge and the grass of the chapel trimmed.

The giving of the legacy was in the hands of a committee made up of the priest, the manager of the bank and Hegarty of the pub. Every man of the parish had put in his application for the job but in every man the committee found a failure somewhere and the job remained idle and the cottage with it and all the while the money was piling up in the bank. Hegarty would turn a man down because he did not drink and the priest would turn down another because he did drink. The bank manager would not agree with the politics of the man the priest favoured and so there was never any conclusion. But every year when the time came we all made application still. The legacy had become a cant in the place so that no one ever said 'Till the end of the world' but, instead, they would say, 'Till the settling of Miss Halloran's will.'

Now Brady, before he died, was ever a great man for the pint or the glass of malt, according to his humour. It was one of the things against him with a part of the committee. But from the moment he came back all that was changed. Not once did he

put his foot inside Hegarty's pub. There was something miraculous about it. It set the people wondering and those who always voted the safe way followed his example immediately. The slow-in-the-uptake ones followed suit a day or so after. For after all he must have had a good strong reason for doing what he did and the only reason could be from what he had learnt when he was dead. Soon Hegarty was almost out of his wits. There was his fine bar, stocked to the ceiling and empty of custom from opening to closing. Trade had gone to the devil—or the other way.

Hegarty went to see the priest about it but naturally got no satisfaction when all that Brady had done overnight was what the priest had been trying to do for years. He went to Brady himself about it and argued with him and cursed him. He pointed to his wife and children and the ruin staring them in the face. But Brady said never a word but just stood, looking through him, as though he was a dummy.

The next one on Jim's programme was the bank manager. In the middle of the next fair day Brady went up to the bank when it was full and at its busiest and he wrote out on a piece of paper that he wanted what bit of money he had in the bank out. The manager had to give it to him. Brady stood there on the steps of the bank, in full view of the fair, counting his money carefully before he tucked it away in his pocket. Some of them took the hint at once. Others took the night to think what it might mean. Anyway, the following day the bank was besieged by every man in the place who had a few pounds put by, wanting it out, and the manager had to give it till the safe was empty. After that the only money he had to count was the money in his own pocket and the Dublin managers were beginning to want to know what might have happened.

The following Sunday while the parish was on its way to Mass, there was Jim Brady working away in his garden, in full view, with never a move out of him in the direction of the chapel. That was the only fine day we had in that week and Brady was a whole week ahead of the rest of us. It was the same the following Sunday and the holy day that came in the same week.

That set the parish thinking on a new line. After all, there was many a man with a fierce thirst on him had given up drink by Brady's example and Brady had even gone against himself in the matter of the drills and ridges. The next Sunday about half a dozen of the men of the place missed Mass. The Sunday after that a score followed. And the Sunday after that it was like the reformation with only the women of the parish in the chapel.

The priest preached a sermon on Brady when he saw the way that things were going, saying that it was all nonsense about him coming back from the dead and that they were not to believe it. That was alright in its way but it did not get over the matter of the drills and the ridges nor yet of the drink. All that the sermon did was to whip the women up so that a civil war broke out in the

parish of the women against the men. There were threats and there were scoldings. The men would be left without their dinners and they would reply by leaving the women without the wages. So it went on. But Jim Brady took no notice and went his own way, saying nothing to anyone.

The time came round again for the application for Miss Halloran's legacy, and Brady, like the rest of us, put in his application as usual. The rest of us were thrown out as we always were but there was a long sitting of the committee on Jim's application, which went on all day and for half the night. At last Jim himself was sent for to appear before them.

What happened there and what was said and what was not said no one knows—for Brady said nothing about it ever after. But the result of it was that he got the legacy and the back money attached to it. When he had it all certain and in his fist he went back to the bank and banked it there together with the money he had taken out. And he went to Mass the following Sunday and the whole parish followed him in. And he went into Hegarty's and Hegarty was very pleased to see him at any time and whatever Jim asked for, when he got his speech back, which was as soon as the matter was fixed and sealed, Hegarty was in no hurry about the payment. When Christmas came he always gave Hegarty a half dozen of whiskey to go with the bank manager's hamper and the priest's blessing.

There's the power of silence for you, Jeremiah, and the proof that silence is golden. You owe me a pint."

"I do not," replied Jeremiah, "for it is all a damned lie and I don't believe a word of it."

"Wasn't I the witness of every detail of it? I could tell you the very place that it all happened."

"And where was that but in your own fabricationing mind?"

"No—it was in the parish of Paddy M'Ginty's goat."

"And where on earth is that?"

"You are a hard man and a tight man and a scrutinising man, Jeremiah! Would you have me give you a lesson in geography as well as in wisdom for the price of one miserable pint?"

TERESA DEEVY

JOHN POTTER'S STORY

THE time I went to stay in my uncle's house I must have been about twenty-four. 'To stay' I said, thinking it would be for a month or so, and little thinking of all that was to happen before I would leave that house a few years later.

My uncle lived in a low-lying district, a stretch of land that suffered greatly from the flooding. Other people, passing on their way to town would give you 'bad day' or 'heavy weather' and pass on with no more than a slight bit of anxiety that the bad weather might continue and the crops suffer. But with everyone in my uncle's part would be the thought 'Is the river still rising?' Times beyond count we moved every stick of furniture, and all that could be moved from the shop, to the two upstairs rooms. Two rooms only were upstairs, there being no building at all over the shop part of my uncle's house. But whatever we had, or had not, there was the electricity, and that was the saving of us. Loo, that was his eldest girl, was a great one. And no sooner would the floods start but she'd have the little cooker working on the landing outside the bedroom door; wall plugs in every room and on the little bit of landing. Jim Quinlan and myself would do most of the carting around of the stuff, and when we'd have saved what we could from the shop we'd carry the table from the kitchen up to the girl's room, squeezing past Loo on the landing where she'd be getting the breakfast.

More often than not Molly would call from within "Wait a minute, boys, I'm not yet ready," or "I'm getting up now, I won't be a jiff," and we'd stand there waiting till she'd call "Come in." Short and all though it was when we'd come in she'd be ready for us, with the bed made, and the place tidy and presentable as anyone could wish, for Molly was a girl of great refinement. Then she'd come to the table with the soft, warm glow of sleep still about her, and the dusky softness of her eyes would set you wondering... would set your heart travelling many roads that might lead, if God willed it, to joy beyond measure. I did not know then that I was being drawn, little by little, into loving my cousin, Molly, in a way no man should love one so near-related to him. But, *this is not my own story that I'm telling you now*: there would be little enough story in that—only a long tale of the dull, dull ache of years. It is of Ignatius Walsh that I must speak.

Friendly, likeable people, all that family seemed to me, but my uncle, who was a strange morose man, had a deep dislike for them. And that was an embarrassment and a weight on all of

us, for the Walshes lived only a short distance down and across the way and we—Jim Quinlan, Loo, Molly and myself—had a great wish to be with them often. Their evenings were the warm and friendly evenings young people like to have. We did not know then why my uncle had a sullen look and tight-closed lips when any of them came to the house. They came only seldom, it was we that went down the road to them, and there was no other place we liked to spend what free time we had. Except round about Christmas there'd be no party, but at that time sons and cousins would come home for a short spell, and there'd be dancing every evening, and music and what seemed to me, at that time, great merriment.

Ignatius was one of the sons home on holiday. But he differed from the others in this—that he was a student at a seminary college, a young man preparing for the priesthood. As such a one, though there was no vow on him at the time, all frivolity must be resisted, and no dancing and love-making should be indulged in. But Ignatius was one in a thousand—lovely in appearance and speech and manner; he could hold himself gay and merry with the best of them and at the same time seemed to keep himself within bounds. He was a singularly gifted soul; gay and fair-minded, free from scruple. And so he danced with the girls, and gave no offence. But, because he was not, and could never be, quite like the other lads, the girls joked about him, and with him they'd make free, seeing could they shock, or in any way embarrass the young student. Mind you, when this joking first started I think—though they liked him—it was in a kind of contempt—that he could not renounce wholly their own gay manner of living. "Did you see Ignatius go crimson when I caught his hand?" one would ask, and they'd all laugh, and another maybe would better that by saying she had tried to kiss him. It was only Molly, I took note, that never led the laugh against him, and never boasted that he changed his colour for her. But, for all that, she did not check the others and would join in a laugh with them often, though at times I perceived a strange glow in her eyes, and if my look met hers she would turn away. That was the way things were. Ignatius would come at summer and Christmas each year and he at his training.

But, so gradually you'd hardly notice, there was a change. For myself now, I had begun by thinking Ignatius a sweet and harmless boy with not too much strong feeling in him. I cannot now give you any one happening that led me to discover how deeply I had been mistaken, but long before the night of the big flood—when he and Molly were marooned—oh, long before that time. I knew him to be a man of passionate nature, and one who had great strength in his religion. Physically, too, he had altered; that fair, untroubled face we had known now showed lines of ruggedness and nobility. Though the boyish way was still with him, and the habit of throwing back his head, most people saw him now as a man to be dealt with in all seriousness. And by the same token many were saying it was right enough for him when he went to

the college to want fun and merriment at home each Christmas, but time had come to hold himself apart. And—in a way—he did. But, he was there always, at the dances, and some said that if that were known at the college he'd be expelled, others holding it was known and that the fathers were keeping a quiet, keen watch on him. I think all agreed there was something here to be regretted. What Molly thought of it I could never tell for certain, not though I did great reading of her face in those four years. Molly was not "dark" and she was not less kind than she had always been, but she could keep her council when she wished, and so though she laughed and talked with me on many matters the question of Ignatius Walshe was never touched.

About this time, everyone began asking 'and what does Molly think?'—with me it was 'what does she feel?'—but to myself alone I asked that question. She was greatly liked, not without reason; a girl of sterling character, steady and steadfast, with a deep seriousness in her that made it the more lovely to hear the soft gurgling laughter coming so readily from her. To another she'd leave the saying and the doing of funny things, but she was the one with whom a man loved to laugh. To laugh with Molly in those days was my one solace, my one taste of joy—making bearable the pain of longing—for laughter can bridge many things, and, sharing it, we were united. *But it is of Ignatius Walshe that I must tell now, and of the thing that happened.*

Ignatius—it is proved now—was the being who counted most in Molly's life. Out of all the times I watched those two I might tell you a few things. There was that night in the "Countryman's Hall"—a new place that had been opened—and some were dancing. Ignatius was standing near the door, and I thinking what signs of struggle and suffering were in his face, then he turned to go for he had not seen Molly, she was in the window-seat at the far side of the door. As he passed, Molly put out her hand very quietly, touching his arm. I remember as clear as before me the change that came over his face; all torment and strain went out of it, leaving him calm and happy. He sat beside her. But later that night I overheard—no matter how—Ignatius, in a low voice to her, "How could the two of us have been so near and I not to know it?" Molly laughed, and that was the one and only time I ever heard her laugh sound false. It was a very wrong thing that had been said to her... considering the situation of the man, although he had not, as yet, any vows laid on him.

There was another night—and this was in Ignatius' home. His mother was in the room that night, and some people had been saying lately that she was nervous and was getting to dislike Molly very greatly. "Ignatius," she said in her high-pitched tone, "Father O'Riordan is coming this way to-morrow." Now Father O'Riordan was one of the heads at Ignatius' college, and we all knew that. But Ignatius looked across at her, and spoke quiet, "Then I hope he will come to see us, Mother," and I think everyone

was pleased—his mother, maybe, most of all. And now on my honour, I did not mean to listen to them, but once during that evening I got wedged into a corner where Molly and Ignatius were close by, and I could not stir in time to show them I was there. "What will I say to him, Molly, if he does come to-morrow? Will I tell him all?" But, there came no answer, and, though I strained forward, I could not see her face. The face of the man beside her was filled with agony and dread.

But Father O'Riordan did not come, for the big storm broke that night, and for days there was rain without ceasing, and we living in the upstairs rooms again. It was then Molly seemed to grow mad, reckless! There was no need at all for her to set out looking for the cow. "Sheer nonsensical" her sister told me, but nothing could turn Molly from the purpose. So, while Jim Quinlan and I helped my uncle to bail out the water from the store-room, she went—we knowing nothing. Wading she was, with the high boots up above her knees. As the short day was drawing to a close anxiety drove Loo to tell us, and I got ready to set out and look for her. The clouds opened then, the like of that rain I have never seen, and with it the knowledge of greater danger for her. The small curragh was strapped across my shoulder, and some floating apparatus, and I was ready when Finbarr Walshe came, on a raft, to our door. He was the one of that family that my uncle liked the least, but now he gave good word. "Molly is safe, but marooned," he said, half laughing; himself was bound for Bilberry Rock where the grandmother lived alone. Her cottage would be high and dry, but she without food, so Finbarr had provisions strapped on him. He told us how they had cleared his mother and everyone out of their house the day before, for it was dangerous deep around their place, and that was why he would on no account let Molly leave their house—short though the distance was. "Hard enough to float myself on the raft," he said. "Molly exhausted, was working her way back to ye; I pulled her to safety through the window." My uncle was very mad, Molly to make such a show of herself, but he could not say a word; Finbarr spoke well. "She's safe and feathered—and there's food and light. The floods will subside to-morrow." With the rain pouring that sounded not like sense, but he pointed towards their house, and in the growing darkness you could see a glimmer of light in the top window. "That's Molly," said he, with a strange laugh, "would you ask she go through danger?" Right and all Walshe's top room was known for safety always. So we agreed to let him go. Pushing off, he threw a look at me "And she's in good company too," so low that my uncle did not hear. I splashed out into the water after him, and laid hold of his raft. "You said," I hissed, "the house was empty." "And so it was, but Ignatius came back. No trains running to the college, the line is flooded." And again he laughed in that way I did not like. "Let them dry their toes at the fire," he said, making to get away. But when I held him he turned angry. "What harm can come to her with a man near-

priested? Is it my own brother you are doubting?" At that I let him go, but I was plunged in torment. Yet why should I doubt Molly, or Ignatius either, Ignatius who was but a few months now from priesthood's goal? But again... "*What will I say to him, Molly, if he does come to-morrow?*" If Ignatius were to break with the college now, and give up his calling... and if he and Molly But the world swam for me. I could not follow my thought...

My uncle, though I did not tell him, seemed no less troubled than myself. "I have the curragh," I suggested, but he shook his head, for had not Finbarr locked the house, and would we mistrust a neighbour and break in, bringing damage likely to their place. So we went back to the salvage work, and then my uncle opened his heart to me. That night I learned the reason for his dislike of the Walshes: how the father of Ignatius and of Finbarr one day in the past had come frightening my Aunt Catherine when my uncle was away. And though nothing happened, he was not forgiven, and his sons, when he was long years dead—and though their mother was a saintly woman—were held ever in suspicion by my uncle. "What is in the blood runs on." It was a bad night for me to hear that. A wild fire burned within me.....Molly.....Molly.....But we worked on until the small hours of the morning, and then I could no longer stand it. "I am going down to Walshe's to fetch Molly." They stared at me. "Lad, alive, it will be daybreak soon," Jim Quinlan said with a chuckle. Jim and Loo were to be married in the Spring, and he was second to my uncle in command. But I set off.

The curragh gave me no trouble, deepening waters made it easy going, and the rain had stopped. I was close to Walshe's when I heard a sound beside me in the water. "What is that?" I cried. Clear and joyous came Ignatius' voice beside me. "Having a morning swim." And the laugh of him! It was like a ray of sunlight out of clouds. His fair head came beside me, his face, glimmering white in the darkness, showed, when my lantern flashed on him, the nobility of its outline. And the thought darted through me, how had I doubted this man. "Go back the way you came," he spoke with urgency; "and take me along with you." Cold water was no place to stop in, he had a hold of the curragh, and turned her about, then reading my thought, "Molly is safe, and by now maybe asleep." The ring of victory in his voice sent joy rushing through me. "Back.....back," he commanded, pushing further from the house. Clearly he had found himself, and my heart, always with Molly, quickened its beat with pity for her.

When Jim Quinlan and myself had Ignatius rolled in blankets we did not question. He was played out. Lying on my bed, and turned to the wall, he looked, I thought, like a man who has fought hard and very long.

My uncle asked no word, and when I would have spoken—after Ignatius had left us the next day—he stopped me. But the first day Molly was back with us at dinner in the upstairs room

he came in late, and she pushed over making place for him to sit beside her. "I'm not sitting down to dinner with the likes of you," he said. I made to spring at him, but Jim and Loo were quick to hold me back. Then Molly spoke. "Very well, I ask no one to sit with me," and she left the room. There was a queer silence... except that I was talking...talking...calling him a liar, and that I could prove it.

That night, when her father was absent, and the rest of us were gathered round the fire Molly did a lot of talking, which was unlike her. I'll cut it short. When Finbarr Walshe had pulled her through the window out of danger she thought he was alone. Ignatius had come back...that much we knew. And then she started laughing, and wild talk; you'd give the world to have her check herself... Molly as near as told us she had sent a would-be lover that night about his business. A shameful thing to say against him: I burned with shame for her. Black bitter her tone had gone, showing clearly where the "leaving" was. Scoffingly she boasted, "I pushed him through the window, and he went splashing till you picked him up." A sense of justice urged me to turn on her, for I believed, and still do believe, that by the grace of God Ignatius had on that night lifted her, body and root and all, out of his heart, because he felt himself called on to make the sacrifice. Something of the ravaged look on his tired face came up before me, and I chided Molly, saying "He it was made the desperate decision and has turned from you for ever." Her breath seemed to stop, she stood up and half turned towards me, a sound came, but no words; whether she was trying to say something, or trying not to say it—but it sounded like a groan. Everyone was struck staring now, but she walked to the door, quite steady, though her hand went out and she near it, groping to make sure... A great gloom fell on us, and they said to me "She'll never forgive that to you."

By reason of those words "she'll never forgive that to you" I was doubly glad that when I was leaving them for good three days later Molly came out sweet and gentle to say good-bye and put her two arms up about my neck, with them all there: a great sweetness was on her, like a wave of loving forgiveness, and she kissed me. That was the last time I saw, and felt, Molly with the soft warmth of youth about her.

I was to take the 'bus that night, bringing me back to my homeland, but I threw the few parcels into the 'bus, and set off to tramp the road. Twenty miles I walked that night. There are times when a man cannot sit caged and cramped in a bus.....

It was not long before I heard of Ignatius made a priest, and then, about a year later, that he was for the foreign mission. But when word came that Father Ignatius and two others had been set upon in China—where bad work was breaking out—and had been massacred, God forgive me, but I nearly felt him to deserve it—he that had brought ruin into Molly's life.

I bowed before God's justice when I heard the most terrible of all—Molly had gone queer. The hearing of his cruel end on top of all she had suffered. 'Unhinged' they said, and the doctor thought she might right herself, and in time be allowed again to leave the Home. And so she was, and there could be no better testimony of the bed-rock bravery that was in her. A valiant spirit.

I never thought to feel glad in hearing of Molly's marriage, but I was glad when Michael Brennan took her. An oldish man, and Molly, grave of purpose, set out to live her life with him.

They had four children, and Brennan left her well set-up. I dreaded going to her—because of that new deadness all were finding in her—but someone heard her say she'd like to see me.

Those few hours I spent at her house that day seemed deadlly quiet, though there was constant movement around us all the time—her children, and the men coming for their dinner, for it was Spring, and many working. Molly tended all, but she moved around without the signs of life that should be in her—for she was but in the 'forties at this time. She'd listen to you, and she'd answer, but seemed sunken away into herself. At times, when a lot of talk was going on, I saw her listening, like to a sound outside, and I'd glance towards the door, thinking she had heard a step. But, she'd get up then and be helping one or other of the men to some more stew.

I could stand it no longer. "Molly," I said, "I'll be going." She came to the door with me. "And thank you for coming," she said, her hand lying gentle as ever in my own. "Life is a sad thing," I said. She looked at me with mild surprise. "How can it be sad with the birds at their Spring mating—even if they have but a short time of life." I left her then, and with the Spring songs loud around me I went down the road, knowing then I should be grateful for those short days when Molly and I had laughed in perfect unison.

God rest her soul.....she was a lovely creature.

TWO VIEWS ON GEORGE DARLEY

1. By PADRAIC COLUM

1946, unless I am out in my reckoning, was the centenary of the death of George Darley. Perhaps it was knowledge of this that led Cecil Salkeld to suggest that an article on Darley was in order and the editors of *Irish Writing* to invite such articles from L. A. G. Strong and myself. It would be heartening if a Darley celebration were held in Dublin: Dublin University should mark the occasion if only by naming a walk in its grounds for the poet of "Nepenthe."

There is no portrait of George Darley: however, a description left of him suggests to me that he resembled a relative of his who died in 1930—Arthur Darley, the violinist, whose playing added greatly to the artistry of the Abbey Theatre. I think Arthur was George Darley's grand-nephew. When I read a description of the elder I can see Arthur Darley's face, studious and enthusiastic, his lighted eyes, his tall figure that drooped a little. George was passionately devoted to music and Arthur, like George, was a scholar. Streatfield, who published "Nepenthe" sixty years after the poet had it printed, relates an incident which helps in the portrayal of George Darley: once when he was walking with some girl cousins along the Dublin roads he was approached by a beggar-woman. While one of the girls fumbled in her purse, the woman turned to the poet with "You, sir, now, with your blackbird's eye." He probably had the eager glance of a bird.

He was born in Dublin in 1795; he spent his childhood in his grandfather's house in the Dublin hills, riding a good deal through the Dublin and Wicklow countryside. He had two great disabilities—one was to have the effect of making him an isolated man, and the other that of breaking the continuity of any intellectual labour he might engage in—he had a bad stammer and he had recurring headaches. Taking his degree in Dublin University, he hesitated for some time between a scientific and a literary career; he went to England to pursue letters. The books of his that had the widest circulation in his own life time were his "Popular Algebra" and his "Popular Geometry." He wrote dramatic criticism, he wrote about pictures, he wrote prose sketches, and he wasted much effort in writing plays that have all the ingredients of the Elizabethan drama—plays which have no real dramatic movement, no focus of action, no reality of character. His pastoral "Sylvia, or the May Queen" has delightful lyrics strewn through it, and has pieces of description in the guise of stage-directions which are delightful, too. He died around the age of fifty.

In the "Oxford Book of English Verse" three of his lyrics are given: "Song" which appears in other collections as "Serenade of a Loyal Martyr," and which begins "Sweet in her green dell the

flower of beauty slumbers;" "To Helene" which opens with the lines "I sent a ring—a little band of emerald and ruby stone" and "The Fallen Star" which has this opening:—

A star is gone! A star is gone!
There is a blank in Heaven;
One of the cherub choir has done
His airy course this evening.

There is musical quality in these but we are content to think of their maker as one of the definitely minor poets. In "The Golden Treasury of Modern Lyrics" we find George Darley on the first page with four stanzas entitled "The Phoenix," a poem that is decidedly original, but one that tells us nothing of the poet's range. In other anthologies we are likely to find "It is not Beauty I demand," a poem which so perfectly reproduces the convention of Cavalier poetry that we are made to think of Darley as having nothing to contribute but the stately graces of a belated Cavalier lyricist.

The publication of "Nepenthe" sixty years after the poet had it printed takes Darley out of the twilight zone of minor poetry. This poem—it is a fairly long one—was written towards the close of Darley's career, and was given hardly any circulation. It was published by R. A. Streatfield from an imperfect copy in the British Museum, and it is included in R. A. Streatfield's and in Ramsay Colles's collection of Darley's poetry. "The Phoenix" which appeared in "The Golden Treasury of Modern Lyrics" was taken from it. Darley described "Nepenthe" as "a fragmentary sketch;" it has the excess, the lack of focus, which we might expect to find in a first poem. "Nepenthe" is said to be unfinished; the poet had it in his mind to write three cantos and has written only two. But would a third canto have completed a poem in which there is no recognizable design? We should read "Nepenthe" not for any interest in the "Mythos" which Darley tried to mould his poem on, but for the pictures that come to us in a flight over mountains, through seas, and across deserts:—

Steed of sterility ! O, more fleet
Must be my Arimaspsian feet
To 'scape the dragon of the air
Winding me round with sulphury flare,
Than the wild ostrich as she glides
Sheer onward with unpanting sides.

The flight of the wild ostrich—"sheer onward with unpanting sides" is an apt image in a poem which is altogether made up of descriptions and exclamations—scenes glimpsed in a headlong rush, and apostrophes that are breathlessly made.

The second canto opens with an apostrophe to Antiquity

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which the poet sets over against Time. I know no passage in poetry which gives so much of the sense of awe that comes to us from the sculptures of Babylon, Egypt, and Persia, than do some of the lines in such an apostrophe as this:—

Still at thy works in mute amaze,
Sorrow and envy and awe we gaze,
Enlarge our little eyeballs still
To grasp in these degenerate days
Marvels that showed a mighty will,
Huge power and hundred-handed skill,
That seek prostration and not praise
To faint such lofty ears to fill.

There is a passage about the sea that has the same suggestion of vastness:—

Hurry me, Nymphs, O hurry me
Far above the grovelling sea,
Which, with blind weakness and base roar
Casting his white age on the shore,
Wallows along the slimy floor;
With his widespread webbed hands
Seeking to climb the level sands,
And rejected still to rave
Alive in his uncovered grave

In the hills between Dublin and Wicklow where he spent his childhood he was always looking upon water—he had glimpses of the sea; wells, streams and tarns were in his familiar landscape. When in a letter to one of his cousins he recalls Wicklow, the scene is “the green, deep slopes beyond St. Kevin’s Bed running down aslant from the hilltop into the lake, and the sun drops sparkling on the black surface of the water, and the three mer-maidens that wiled with their songs another Anchorite almost out of his self-control and discretion.” When he writes about water he is most inspired. If, instead of the three poems of his that are given in the “Oxford Book,” certain poems that came out of his feeling for this element had been given, George Darley would long ago have been praised for the verve I now claim for him. I shall quote one of the poems from his “Syren Songs”—it is named “The Mer-maidens Vesper Hymn”:—

Troop home to silent grotts and caves !
Troop home ! and mimic as you go
The mournful winding of the waves
Which to their dark abysses flow.

At this sweet hour, all things beside
In amorous pairs to covert creep:

The swans that brush the evening tide
Homeward in snowy couples keep.

In his green den the murmuring seal
Close to his sleek companion lies,
While single we to bedward steal,
And close in fruitless sleep our eyes.

In bowers of love men take their rest,
In loveless bowers we sigh alone,
With bosom-friends are others blest—
But we have none ! But we have none !

And there is "The Rebellion of the Waters": —

Arise ! The Sea-god's groaning shell
Cries madly from his breathless caves,
And staring rocks its echoes tell
Along the wild and shouting waves.
Arise ! Awake ! ye other streams,
That wear the plains of ruined Troy,
Ida's dark sons have burst their dreams,
And shake the very hills for joy.

Pressed by the King of Tides, from far
With nostril split and bloodshot eye,
The web-foot minions of his car
Shriek at the waves, they lighten by.
The noise of total hell was there,
As fled the rebel deeps along;
A reckless, joyous prank they dare,
Though thunder fall from Neptune's tongue.

The short "Hymn to the Sun" following these two would **certainly make** us acknowledge the verve, not in all Darley's poems **but in** certain of them, and in many passages in "Nepenthe."

Poets are identified by a particular poem of theirs, and the poem that identifies Darley to most readers of collections of poetry is his "It is not Beauty I demand," a poem that was mistaken for an authentic Caroline relique: —

It is not Beauty I demand,
A crystal brow, the moon's despair,
Nor the snow's daughter, a white hand,
Nor mermaid's yellow pride of hair.

The divergent images in the enumeration are properly fantastic, and yet they are related. As we read the first stanza we know what

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the conclusion will be, and yet we are carried on by its earnestness of statement:—

Eyes can with baleful ardour burn,
Poison can breath that erst perfumed,
There's many a white hand holds an urn
With lovers' hearts to dust consumed.

For crystal brows—there's nought within,
They are but empty cells for pride,
He who the syren's hair would win
Is mostly strangled in the tide.

Give me, instead of beauty's bust,
A tender heart, a loyal mind,
Which with temptation I could trust,
And never linked with error find.

The inversion in the line "Poison can breath that erst perfumed" damages this verse, and one is surprised that a poet of Darley's accomplishment let it stand. Still the poem is remarkable, not only for the triumphant use of the convention in terms of brilliancy and inventiveness, but also for the gravity, the conviction that upholds it all. We will have to say that Darley contributed nothing to what we can name Irish poetry in English: the few attempts he made to link his imagination with anything that might seem Irish are half-hearted and only reproduce the 'Celticism' of Ossian.

2. By L. A. G. STRONG

NOTE:—The Editors have let me see Padraic Colum's essay, so that mine would not cover the same ground. I have therefore omitted any account of Darley's life and career, and concentrated on his character and on certain aspects of his work, in the hope that what I have written may be complementary to Colum's essay.

My own interest in Darley began early; my copy of his poems has on its flyleaf 1917, the year I bought it. I knew Arthur Darley, the violinist, and two of his sisters, one of them well, but they could tell me little about the poet. I have not, I confess to my shame, read Professor Claude Collier Abbott's *Life of Darley*: what follows is based on sources available to everyone and on the poems themselves.

George Darley stammered badly, suffered from headaches, quarrelled with his family, felt that he wrote the worse for dividing his energies between poetry and mathematics, and believed himself to be unjustly neglected. These facts seem to me of great importance to any attempt at understanding his work. It will, I

think, come in for a good deal of attention in the next twenty years or so, because of certain qualities which are more to the taste of critics today than yesterday; and its incompleteness makes it more interesting, in some respects, than many a poetic programme which was more fully realised. A casualty by the Romantic roadside, Darley, in his weakness and his erratic flashes of power, helps us to understand other travellers by that road, and the road itself.

First of all, let him speak for his own disabilities. He is writing to Miss Mitford:—

"I write at this fearful length because it is the only way . . . in which I can ever have unpainful communion with any friend. My impediment is, as it were, a hideous mask upon my mind, which not only disfigures, but nearly suffocates it."

He did not exaggerate. Beddoes, after describing him as "a tallish, slender, pale, light-eyebrowed, gentle-looking baldpate," adds that he stammered "to a most provoking degree, so much so as to be almost inconvertible." This was in 1824; and although later in life he seems to have in some measure overcome it—a young law student who met him in the early 'forties speaks of his "highly intellectual conversation" and his readiness in quotation and learned argument—there is widespread testimony to the crippling effect of the stammer and its injury to the poet himself.

Then there were the headaches, and the lassitude which followed them.

"My health is an indifferent one; a tertian headache consumes more of my life than sleep does, and, worse than this, not only wasting it, but wearing it down. And I have to scribble every second day for means to prolong this detestable, headachy life, to criticise and review, committing *literary fratricide*, which is an iron that enters into my soul, and doing what disgusts me, not only with that day but with the remaining one."

For "literary fratricide" he had an uncommon talent. Even in an age of ferocious reviewing Darley's comments on his brother dramatists and poets were held to be severe. He knew this, and alternately apologised for and tried to justify it. His reference in the pseudonymous *The Enchanted Lyre* to "an obscure young man, one G.—D.—" who "by a most unhandsome trick of his (spiriting vinegar through his teeth or out of a quill) . . . mortally offended several of my best friends . . ." is clear enough. In a letter to a relative, Darley defends his critical asperities.

"I never 'hint' anything against anyone, I speak my thoughts out plain, and rather pride myself on the pointedness of my sarcasm which cannot be mistaken. Venom will not rest with me; I must spit it, and then am rid of it. Is not this better than to have it rankle and fester in my heart?"

Better for whom? In that last sentence Darley reveals a pathological egotism and isolation from his kind, besides what he called to Miss Mitford his "compelled misanthropy." She herself was in no doubt as to the source of it all. It was "his own disap-

pointment, in not being acknowledged as one of the great poets of the age," and it produced in him "the most intolerant fastidiousness and determination to disallow all merit in other writers, such writers as Scott and Wordsworth, for instance . . ."

This is too easy, too sweeping, and not quite accurate. For instance, Darley expressly says of Wordsworth that, although from the first he had many admirers, they were far from as many as he deserved. But there is undoubtedly a good deal of truth in it.

How real was the disappointment? Or rather, the neglect? Darley's belief in it was absolute, overshadowing and darkening his belief in himself. He did in fact receive considerable praise, and from authoritative sources. Charles Lamb thought well of him. Coleridge "sometimes liked to take up *Sylvia*." Cary, the translator of Dante, rated it above all poems of its time. Elizabeth Barrett Browning called it "beautiful" and "tuneful." Tennyson admired Darley's work, and offered to finance the publication of a volume of his poems. Carlyle knew and liked him. From his account, we may guess that Darley was in awe of him and kept his sarcasms in check. "An amiable, modest, vivacious and intelligent man," Carlyle calls him, and adds that he was "considerable" as a mathematician.

Darley met and was on friendly terms with many of the well-known writers of his day; yet he was very much out of the swim. I can find no mention of him in Byron's letters, in Moore's *Journal*, in the lives or records of Rogers, Hobhouse, Mary Shelley, or Maginn. He hated and reviled Byron, a fact which could account for his being ignored by the poet and his friends; or did his abuse of *Childe Harold* derive from lack of recognition? He knew some of the *Frazers'* group, but I can find nothing about him in the magazine. Evidently there were good grounds for his repeated protestations that he was a recluse and a solitary. But was his isolation cause or effect? There is no doubt that his talents, and such reputation as he had, were more than enough to make him free of any literary company he wished to join. It is true he made use of pseudonyms and paid for the publication of his poems; *Nepenthe* appeared ill-printed on "a coarse, discoloured paper, like that in which a country shopkeeper puts up his tea" (Miss Mitford). Yet he was well-known in the book world, and the people who knew him were quite ready to bear with a stammer which did not hide his intelligence or his movements of friendliness.

Was it then the ferocity and truculence of his reviewing that isolated him? A savage critic might be shunned, but we would expect to hear a good deal more about him than we hear of Darley. It seems more likely that a combination of circumstances kept him from the limelight. The comparative failure of *Sylvia*, and his ineptitude for the theatre, were not enough to disqualify him. His own wavering belief in his powers, his mortification at the world's refusal to acclaim them, his exaggerated sensitiveness, even his apparent resolve to avenge his own lack of success on those who

were successful, do not account for such a large neglect. Darley was out of the fashion—a more deadly disqualification than any on his list. We have seen, in our own day, how a degree of originality which puts its exponent outside all the active camps and confederations of poets can lead not to abuse but to silence from poets and critics alike. If the originality is strong, and the poet tough and confident, he will sooner or later break through and make his world acknowledge him. But if it is not quite strong enough, and if the poet lets himself be disconcerted and loses belief in himself, then his chances with his own generation are poor. Darley had a streak of originality, a real power of his own; but it went with flaws of imagination and character that made it an obstacle to recognition instead of a help. That he was discouraged we know:

... "When . . . praise is discriminative, it becomes to me what a feather is to an eaglet; argue as we will, the spirit cannot soar without it. Mine has been, I confess, for a long time like one of Dante's sinners, floating and bickering about in the shape of a fiery tongue on the Slough of Despond."

(A fiery tongue—his resentful reviewing?)

"If it ever has risen, 'twas an *ignis fatuus* only . . . Murder is done every night upon genius by neglect and scorn. You may ask, could I not sustain myself on the strength of my own approbation? But it might be only my vanity, not my genius, that was strong."

One drawback of Darley's work was that it was Romantic, but outside the accepted tradition. Perhaps we might say of it that it had to the Romanticism of Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, and Coleridge a relationship not unlike that of the later Jacobean plays to the plays of the Elizabethan heyday. (Darley edited, rather grudgingly, the works of Beaumont and Fletcher.) Romantic art, in Mr. F. L. Lucas's memorable phrase, releases the less conscious levels of the mind. In Darley the images released are darker, more morbid, less comely, and at the same time the poet has less discipline, less conscious control. One result is great unevenness, sudden harshnesses, technical infelicities even in short lyrics, and in general a more passive, a more subjective attitude to what came through. The dreamer records his dream with less and less attempt to scrutinise or interpret it. This passivity was to reach a climax in another Irish poet, A.E., who, fortunately, was a great and good man, so that, in their least perfect realisations, his visions resulted in verse that was merely imprecise and woolly. The method has had its successes, its miracles even: but it is terribly dangerous, as Yeats, whose imagination was even more powerful, quickly understood.

In his poetic faith Darley was an out-and-out Romantic.

"The highest truths are reached by flights of imagination. The delicate and otherwise imperceptible shades of thought are discovered by flashes of that divine faculty, and would be gone for ever if you sent slow-footed common sense at a careful jog-trot after them."

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He went on to admit, however, that common sense was necessary too, and that its union with imagination formed "a far better mind than either of them separate." Most of Darley's common sense went into the mathematics which he taught professionally at Trinity College. His verse, despite flashes of brilliant technical success, remains for the most part uncontrolled in substance. He wrote lyrics of individual beauty, and had a welcome and unusual faculty of introducing into them an epigrammatic wit. But his longer works lack design. They have variety, and novelty, often very bold, of metre and rhythm: but there is an unfinished quality about them, an air of improvisation that reminds one of Shelley's off moments. Yet—and here I differ mildly from Padraic Colum—Darley's achievement at his height was a real addition to the technique and substance of poetry.

Laid like the young fawn mossily
In sun-green vales of Araby,
I woke hard by the Phoenix tree
That with shadeless boughs flamed over me;
And upward called by a dumb cry
With moonbroad orbs of wonder, I
Beheld the immortal Bird on high
Glassing the great sun in her eye.
Steadfast she gazed upon his fire,
Still her destroyer and her sire;
As if to his her soul of flame
Had flown already, whence it came;
Like those that sit and glare so still,
Intense with their death struggle, till
We touch, and curdle at their chill!
But breathing yet while she doth burn,
The deathless Daughter of the sun!
Slowly to crimson embers turn
The beauties of the brightsome one.

I do not see how anyone can fail to recognise a new voice here, an individual technique, and, what is evident in this passage and in many others, though seldom consistent and never long sustained, a real control over the turbulent material of the dream. Dream was Darley's keynote. He opened the gates generously and for the most part fearlessly, but was too much at the mercy of what came through. Poets of his type resemble mediums who receive uncritically whatever enters their field; whereas the great medium, the great artist retain a measure of conscious control, not necessarily exercised at the time of writing, but manifest in revision and in the finished work which is put before the public. Darley had original gifts, but they were not quite strong enough. He himself was not strong enough. "... I have seldom the power to direct my mind, and must *only* follow it."

Of Darley as a critic of painting there is no room to speak here, even if I were qualified to do so. But some writers who are

in a position to know regard his work in this field as important and valuable for originality and insight.

There remains one important point, which may or may not have added to his difficulties as a poet. Darley was a Christian. With him, that turning towards the Light which all the Romantics acknowledged was specific, intellectual, and doctrinal. "Should we not endeavour to approach the Most High," he asks, "in *all* His perfections, intelligence as well as goodness?" He feels himself weak and uncertain, needing "discriminative praise" as "the proof that my supposed path towards the Centre of Light is not an aberration." Imagination and reality should be kept in perfect balance.

"Such indeed always is, always should be, the scope of a truly Catholic poet. But alas! I fear myself a poor sectarian. The double mind seems wanting in me; certainly the double experience, for I have none of mankind."

It is the same story, the unsteady balance, the self-distrust, the confusion of motives, the despondency, the uprush of hope and confidence that each time proved an *ignis fatuus*. Yet in Darley's very weakness and the inequalities of his work there is encouragement for his successors. He wrote, with a typical gesture, his own epitaph:—

Mortal, pass on! — leave me my desolate home!
 I care not for thy sight; I scorn thy tear;
 To this wild spot let no intruder come,
 The winds and rains of Heaven shall mourn me here!

This Byronic flourish—how he would hate to have it so described!—does not represent the truth. More and more readers will come to Darley's poems, and feel affection for the shy, morbidly sensitive and disappointed man who wrote them.

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POSTSCRIPT FOR IRISH PROTESTANTS

A WAY back in the years beyond the flame and thunder of two World Wars George Bernard Shaw wrote the "Preface for Politicians" that introduces the printed version of *John Bull's Other Island* (1912 'Home Rule' edition). In that scintillating essay in Anglo-Irish polemics there is a passage about Parnell that still retains its sting in spite of (or is it because of?) all the salt water that has since flowed in and out through the North Channel of the Irish Sea.

"Parnell," wrote Shaw, "was so proud of his Irish birthright that he would rather have been one of even a persecuted minority in an Irish Parliament than the premier of an English cabinet. He was not afraid of his countrymen: he knew that Protestantism could hold its own only too well in a free Ireland; and even if he had not known it, he would have taken his chance rather than sell his birthright and his country."

Parnell stood, in fact, between the Protestant Nation of the eighteenth century and what we might call the "Protestant negation" of the day before yesterday. He represented the last peak or high point in a graph that had been declining long before his time. Sygne speaks somewhere of "the mouse-eaten libraries and mouldering greenhouses" he found in Wicklow as the last melancholy relics of what had once been a high-spirited race of Protestant patriots. Great orators and hard-hitting pamphleteers had been reared in those libraries; a great tradition had established itself and had then gradually guttered out like a candle in the wind. By the time Parnell came along hardly a spark of the old Protestant genius survived and the "pride of Erin's isle" was left like a torch burning gustily in the ruins of an ancient house where formerly the halls and passage-ways had blazed with crystal chandeliers.

Why had the tradition declined? Every Irishman knows the answer. It had declined by sheer negation. Yeats speaks somewhere of Berkeley as the man who "fought the Salamis of the Irish intellect." Berkeley and Swift had, between them, established a tradition of clear thinking and hard hitting—a tradition which, while it might be labelled Anglo-Irish rather than Irish, had at any rate the virtue of acknowledging the reality of, not so much the Irish Sea, as the gulf between the Irish and the English minds. It did not apologise for itself and it never denied the earth in which it was rooted. It drew its inspiration through the fountains of Greece and Rome, and it expressed itself in English, but in doing so it evolved a sinewy, muscular English of its own—a recognisably Irish way of using the English tongue.

Then came the Union, and from the Union to the "mouse-eaten libraries and mouldering greenhouses" is, historically speaking, a brief and logical journey. The great negation had begun, and what happened to the "Protestant nation" after that was, fundamentally, of its own contriving.

Parnell, then, was a last peak in a declining graph; Shaw an afterglow from the brilliant little Protestant Nation of the eighteenth century—an afterglow transferred to (some would say quenched in) the service of English Socialism. The era of “Protestant negation” was already more than half a century old, and the next famous writer born of Irish Protestant stock, William Butler Yeats, showed himself perfectly conscious of the new Protestant dilemma. The Protestant Nation had been either completely unconscious of, or benevolently patronising towards, the hidden Gaelic Ireland that began beyond its coverts and its gate-lodges. Now that Gaelic world had found its voice again, echoing back to it from the days before Kinsale; had begun to organise itself in classes and leagues, even behind the Georgian doorways of Merrion Square, and the protestant portals of Trinity College. The next obvious step, then, was a marriage between Kathleen Ni Houlihan and the Protestant poet—and a fruitful marriage it was, giving us the Abbey Theatre and the world the Irish Literary Renaissance that began with the present century.

There were, however, two ways of using the tensions and polarities between Protestant Irishmen and Irish Gaels. Yeats used them fruitfully, creatively, producing an almost incandescent illumination. The other way was to use the same tensions and polarities to produce not light but mockery. It was the way of Somerville and Ross. A few years ago, taking a last backward glance over the now almost deserted Somerville and Ross country that stretches like a gaily-coloured sporting print into the Irish day before yesterday, that excellent English critic, Mr. V. S. Pritchett, wrote of the Anglo-Irish figures in the landscape:

“Perhaps they are all horses . . . Most of the Somerville and Ross women, with their rain-fierced complexions, their long heads and box-like bodies, their sprained ankles and strained shoulders and their frightful high spirits, are unimaginable without their whites and their bays. Their pace is spanking, their talk flies out like froth.

With a malice and madness that match the Somerville and Ross characters the Irish climate acts as a mirror to their antics. The frost is crisp on the fallen leaves in the bare woods, the woodcock rise out of the trees or the snipe zip away over the frozen bogs into a sky of Neapolitan enamel; but within an hour rain is spouting off the hat brims of the sportsmen and days of mugginess or downpour jail the mind and drive it to thoughts of the whiskey bottle, the long meditated intrigues of tribal life, the treacheries and despondencies of the lonely colonial wits.

A world that was on the verge of becoming Turgenev’s turns into a jungle of Surtees, Tom Moore, and *The Fall of the House of Ussher* . . .”

It is a brilliant picture by a brilliant critic of a clatteringly empty world. What did the Anglo-Irish of the “Protestant negation” think about when they were not talking horse, or in the intervals

of hunting." The answer is that unless they were riding at the next stone wall, or using words as intoxicants in their own lively, irresponsible fashion, they were bored stiff—and at times a little frightened. They didn't stop trying to break their necks or talking for a moment. Open the pages of Somerville and Ross and see them captured for ever, like so many entomological specimens under a sheet of glass. The world that, in Mr Pritchett's vivid phrase, "was on the verge of becoming Turgenev's" frightened them, so they escaped into the pages of Surtees. Sometimes, of an evening, under the dusty chandeliers of their enormous drawing-rooms, surrounded by Louis Quinze chairs with the gilt peeling off, they tinkled a few Tom Moore ballads on pianos that badly needed tuning. That was as near to Irish sentiment as it was safe to steer; the "smile and the tear" were for a past they did not want to examine too closely; and Tom Moore, like Robert Emmet, was safely dead and buried. Outside their windows, beyond their coverts and gate-lodges, the Irish world was getting too like Turgenev to be comfortable, so they preferred not to look at it. The only place they really looked towards was England, and so long as England rewarded them with gusts of laughter directed *through* them at the "poor, dear Irish" beyond, then England surely would not forget her debt of gratitude. If the worst came to the worst, if the Irish world, now pressing so uncomfortably close to their gate-lodges and their long, winding avenues, were to move through the thunderous transitions of a Turgenev novel towards actual revolution—revolution present and threatening, not gilt-framed in the sentimentality of a Tom Moore ballad—then England, they felt, was bound to see them through.

In the end, however she might try to soften the descent, England let them down with a thoroughly justified bump. Nevertheless, they are still there, still with their rain- and, let us add, whiskey-fiercened complexions, still with their sprains and their strained shoulders, still using words as intoxicants in their lively, irresponsible fashion—but this time under the glittering chandeliers of cocktail bars in Dublin's fashionable hotels. It has been a long, rattling, and brilliant hunt, it has added to the gaiety and entertainment of nations, but somehow—with the Irish Republic formulating itself in spite of them—the huntsmen themselves now wear an anxious, hunted look. Their talk still flies out like froth, but in their infrequent silences lurks the suspicion that, to a diminishing thunder of hooves, all they have succeeded in doing is to gallop themselves almost clean out of their native land.

Almost, but not quite. Fortunately they haven't quite succeeded, because there is plenty they *could* do in the Ireland of to-day and to-morrow. Meanwhile, if they can find a Bible about the place, let them ponder the parable of the unjust steward. And if they can't find a Bible, let them—as the next best thing—read the various prefaces to *John Bull's Other Island*, always with the proviso that the island isn't, and never was, John Bull's.

BOOK REVIEWS

A PLAY OF TWO THEATRES

THE COCKTAIL PARTY, A Comedy by T. S. ELIOT (Faber, 10/6).

PROPHECY TO THE WIND, BY NORMAN NICHOLSON (Faber 8/6).

THEATRE IN IRELAND, BY MICHEAL MACLIAMMOIR. Published for the Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland by Colm O'Lochlainn, Dublin. (*The Sign of the Three Candles*, 2/-).

Mr. Eliot's latest verse play is in effect a bid for the best of two theatres: that of West End drawing-room comedy on the one hand, and of poetic, introspective drama on the other. The question remains whether his efforts have been entirely successful, and that despite the brilliance of much of the comedy—apart from wit there is quite a lot of fun in the play—the poetic beauty of several passages, the tension of certain scenes, and the greeting given to the play's production in New York and London. As poet and critic Mr. Eliot has done well to disparage a too other-worldly view of poetry, but it may be more than a romantic bias which prevents one from being wholly taken by so much soul-searching amid an atmosphere so very smart as in "The Cocktail Party". Poetry is significant by way of its universality. And it is difficult to assign just this universality to a poetic play the quality of which is so largely conditioned by its scene, the fashionable urban world, a world traditionally "the world," the sphere of polite prose comedy, and in our time—if it makes any difference to the question—at a comparatively low ebb of vitality.

Already much publicised, it is possible to discuss the play without giving an account of the action. Particularly as both action and characters, admirably contrived though they are, seem in some way divided from the dramatist himself. His tone is not theirs. Well enough in a comedy of observation, but embarrassing in a poetic play where the author's vision of life is so deeply involved. So when Mr. Eliot, with an austere pessimism, reflects on the incompleteness of human attachments, one can take it from him, so to speak, but not entirely from the characters, and not entirely as arising from the situations of this play. One might say, indeed, that these reflections have more force out of their context than in. When in one scene, for instance, the mysterious psychiatrist, Harcourt-Reilly, refers in the same disenchanted manner to the common human condition of marriage, he is obviously thinking of the childless, neurasthenic pair whom he has just advised to accept their lives as they are and "make the best of a bad job". One asks oneself if in the circumstances his generalisations are quite

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good enough. Similarly, when Celia, the heroine, is made to realise the illusory nature of love, the sense of shock which she feels, and which we are meant to perceive as waiting on all humankind, is greatly weakened in general meaning by the negative character of the lover who causes her realisation.

If in respect to universality, "The Cocktail Party" appears inferior to "Murder in the Cathedral" and "Family Reunion", it shows, however, an immense stride in mastery of the theatre. It is obviously a play that, whatever one's feelings about it, could never be less than of extreme interest. The author uses an ordinary but ordered mode of speech, which passes with ease from light exchange, not to the purple passage, but to the graver tone, **the more intense expression.** On that account "The Cocktail Party" is not as quotable as anything by Mr. Christopher Fry, for example, but here, as always, Mr. Eliot creates some of his finest effects by allowing one word to obsess a passage:

That is the worst moment, when you feel that you have lost
The desire for all that was most desirable,
And before you are contented with what you can desire:
Before you know what is left to be desired;
And you go on wishing that you could desire
What desire has left behind.

It is quite another world, a world of the remote future, not unlike that of the remote past, which forms the setting of Mr. Nicholson's "Phophesy to the Wind". The action of the play is laid in Britain, where, in common with the rest of the world, the products of the industrial age have long been abandoned in favour of a patriarchal agricultural system. Into this milieu, by an inversion of the "Berkeley Square" method, comes a young engineer of our time, who, in a genuinely creative spirit plans to restart the machines. But the patriarch of the community, wishing to avoid the great wars of the past, brings about the murder of this amiable young man. He acts against his natural sympathies in doing so, and he is left to question the wisdom of his deed, as man cannot "stay put", and another may yet rediscover "the click of the machines."

Mr. Nicholson's world of the future is homely, humorous, rustic, and somewhat lacking in the strangeness which, rightly or wrongly, one's imagination expects. This play is less "appealing" than "The Old Man of the Mountains" by the same author, but the writing in it has the same fine tang.

The story of the theatre in Ireland is an oft-repeated one—how much in need of a sequel!—but Mr. MacLiammoir is a writer far too accomplished to be boring or to seem repetitious. His little book (it has only 47 pages) covers the history of the Irish stage from the eighteenth century to our own time, and it is of course with the development of the Abbey and Gate Theatres that it is mainly

concerned. Yet in going over this old ground, the reader will find that it is in a manner transformed, quietly strewn with insights of refreshing novelty.

This book is attractively got up with ingenious and amusing illustrations by Norah McGuinness.

T.S.

UNPREDICTABLE DYNAMICS

THE WITHERED BRANCH: SIX STUDIES IN THE MODERN NOVEL. BY D. S. SAVAGE. (*Eyre & Spottiswoode*, 10/6).

On behalf of truth, undefined except in so far as six separate negatives might constitute a fragment of a definition, Mr. Savage, a cocksure critic, takes objection to Ernest Hemingway, E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, Margiad Evans, Aldous Huxley and James Joyce. Mr. Savage is an energetic philosopher, terms and all, even if he doesn't give the reader a fair chance of finding out whether or not his philosophy has as much light as it has energy. Granted that he writes a preface filled with guff about aesthetics—quite literally old guff because it has already been said on several occasions. But he has a weakness for coming to conclusions that have nothing in heaven, hell or on the earth to do with the case; and the function of the novelist as a storyteller never seems to occur to him. Time and again he clearly identifies author with character—a dangerous practice even in the case of James Joyce. Time and again he shows inadvertently that he isn't really too acute at following a story. In fact in the days when the storyteller sat spitting and reciting by the hearth Mr. Savage would (I feel) have been found in the upper room learning the penny catechism by heart. The authors of the penny catechism are as certain of the truth as Mr. Savage, but their definitions are better, and they would probably be more prepared than he is to admit the existence of the variety of thought, incident and character that make up the novelist's material. They would also abstain from calling themselves creative critics.

Here is Mr. Savage off to a flying start: "It is not only the general life of society which is subject to a perpetual condition of habitual automatism; this condition affects even the production and the consumption of literature, so that in this field also the necessity arises from time to time for someone to rise up and issue a similar call to *Bethink yourselves!* and in so doing to let loose the unpredictable dynamic of *the idea* in the midst of a mass of unquestioned assumptions, fixed opinions and established reputations."

Without a blush on his face Mr. Savage then rises up and questions the assumptions of six writers (five great and one, at least, good) solely because they happen to be different from his own assumptions. He is so much kinder to Margiad Evans than to Virginia Woolf that it is hard to avoid thinking that Virginia

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Woolf was too subtle for him, and the Welsh woman, direct and clear, within his reach. He is soundest in his essays on Huxley and Joyce, although his main conclusion about Joyce is, at least, shaken by the fact that in the penultimate episode of *Ulysses* Stephen leaves Eccles Street instead of stepping into the boots of Blazes Boylan and cuckolding Leopold Bloom. No one could deny that Mr. Savage is lively but liveliness is not the only quality necessary in a literary critic or a centreforward.

BENEDICT KIELY.

NEWS OF THE WORLD, BY GEORGE BARKER. (*Faber*, 8/6).
THE MONGREL, AND OTHER POEMS, BY RONALD DUNCAN.
(*Faber*, 8/6).

These two books of verse make an interesting contrast: both authors are young, highly skilled, and well known; but between them looms that indefinable barrier that runs between literature—no matter how good—and poetry. George Barker is well over the fence and everything he feels and says is poetry; even when it is not so good, it is still poetry. But at best his lines are a resounding concatenation of dazzling stereoscopic images; his clear-cut phrases flash heliographically in the sun. And there is a kind of lovable grotesqueness in some of his pictures, as when, in 'Galway Bay' he speaks of 'breakneck seas'

Tall the mysterious queens
Waltzing in on the broad
Ballroom of the Atlantic.

Were I of the psychoanalytical cast of mind, I might be worried by the recurrence in Barker of certain symbols of violence:

. . . before the dawn
Shakes its bright gun in the sky . . .

I watched you and the lamb go by
Cold in the curse of my eye
Or run to the butchering gun of my hand
As I lifted the axe of abandoned
Love over you and lamb . . .

The splendid eagle in his chains
The bald black-handed extrovert
And the gun loaded with a rose.

But I have no doubt Mr. Barker will take these minor aberrations in hand: the speech of slaughter is always with him:

In the first year of the last disgrace
Peace, turning her face away,
Coughing in laurelled fires, weeping,
Drags out from her hatched heart
The sunset axe of the day.

But these criticisms are trivial in face of Mr. Barker's very considerable powers:

I garb my wife,
The wide world of a bride, in devastations.
She has curled up in my hand, and, like a moth
Died a legend of splendour along the line of my life.

No one who cares for poetry can afford to be without this latest book of George Barker.

Mr. Ronald Duncan knows all about poetry: he has all the equipment. But that rare bird, the poetry-addict, will discern behind Mr. Duncan's skilful and sensitive verse, the lover of poetry—rather than the poet. As translator of Cocteau (*The Eagle Has Two Heads*), and librettist-collaborator with Benjamin Britten, Mr. Duncan's work is deservedly well-known. This volume contains Extracts from 'The Eagle Has Two Heads' and 'Mea Culpa,' an Oratorio written in cooperation with Benjamin Britten.

How about this for a comparison with Barker's 'Galway Bay'?

To this morning, as the light
Listlessly lifts the lid of night,
And the fat hips of the ocean
Swing into the harbour, as a woman
Walking before a sailor might
Slap her great thighs of waves upon
The jetty's wall to the spray's delight . . .

Messrs. Faber and Faber are to be congratulated on two excellent books.

CECIL FRENCH-SALKELD.

THE WAGER, and other stories, BY DANIEL CORKERY. (*Devin-Adair*, \$2.75).

From the many short stories which Daniel Corkery wrote about the old places and the old people of Munster, *Devin-Adair* presents sixteen which they consider to be his very best, in a streamlined edition illustrated by Elizabeth Rivers. Some of these stories are Mr. Corkery's best: that restrained still-life study of murder and conscience, "The Return," which Frank O'Connor might have used as a text for his stories of the city lanes; or "The Ploughing of the Leaca," a horrifying study of passion and superstition in the Kerry mountains.

Mr. Corkery seems to know almost the whole of Munster as one knows one's own backyard. And apart from the immense variety of setting, there is the variety of subject and treatment: the fishermen and their craft from Youghal to Skibbereen, the old Fenians of the hills, the crabbed, savage life of the city lanes. The style of writing is completely elusive. Mr. Corkery uses no tricks or devices that one can spot; he invents or colours or highlights

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nothing. He takes the people of Munster, and tells their stories with faithfulness, and, at times, a shocking clarity.

His importance in modern Irish literature is realised by comparatively few people within and without Ireland. "The Wager" will help to alter this position a little, in America at least, and it is to be hoped that it will lead to other American and English editions of Corkery's works: that wonderful novel, "The Threshold of Quiet," for instance, deserves to be far better known than it is.

It is a pity that Devin-Adair did not complete a fine job of publishing by getting a Cork (or at least Irish) artist to illustrate their selection of stories. Elizabeth Rivers's wood-engravings are very fine, and not very arty, pieces in their way. But they are completely non-Irish, in spite of the little thatched cottages, etc., and, once or twice, are completely unfaithful to the stories they illustrate: the back-street scene for "The Lilac Tree," with its criss-cross of overhead wires and its electric-light standards, does not look like a Cork back-alley of twenty years ago to me.

J. E.

HUNGER OF THE HEART, by REARDEN CONNER. (Macdonald, 8/6)

Hunger of the Heart deals mainly with a very short period in the life of Inspector Corcoran of the Civic Guards. The Inspector, young, good-looking, and rather solitary, is sent to take charge of the station at Carrigaloe, a village on the west coast of Ireland. There he finds the only crime of any importance to be the illicit distilling of poteen carried out by the Dalys, a gypsy family of the standard fairy-tale type. His efforts to trap the offenders are complicated by the beautiful daughter, Mauraid, with whom he falls in love.

Minor complications are introduced by the Inspector's second-in-command, Sergeant Cassidy, whose own love for Mauraid is unrequited and who consequently turns to hating her, Corcoran, and the world in general; and by Mauraid's hot-headed, somewhat incredible brother, Larry, who does not see how a policeman in the family can be of any advantage (!) and who decides, therefore, that he must be eliminated. He procures a gun and five bullets (a five-shooter?) and after some abortive practice on a bullying storekeeper (who obliges by dropping dead of fright) he retires in disorder to an island in the lake—the police in hot, if wet, pursuit. Fortunately he is a rotten shot and puts an end to Sergeant Cassidy and another pursuer only because they allow themselves to attain positions where the gun can be steadied against their forehead and top trouser-button respectively. Needless to say, Corcoran, by this time, has received his own bullet-wound in the approved fashion and is awaiting the return of consciousness, of a boat from the mainland with his loved one in it to nurse him, and of the end of the story.

There are many other subsidiary strands in *Hunger of the*

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D.M.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

ANTHONY CRONIN: Born Enniscorthy, 1923. His early work was accepted by "Poetry Ireland." Since then he has appeared in Irish and British periodicals. Is a barrister-at-law.

KEVIN FALLER: Born Galway, 1920. His paternal grandparents were Bavarian. Is a graduate of U.C.G. His first book, "Lyric and Script" a collection of stories, radio work and verse, came out in 1948. Lives in Dublin.

SEAMUS O'NEILL: Born Co. Down, 1910. A graduate of Queen's University, Belfast. Writes mostly in Irish—plays, poems, short stories, and one novel. He also contributed work in English to "Studies", "The Bell", "Irish Bookman", "Irish Monthly", and many overseas publications. Is on the staff of Carysfort Training College and is Gaelic columnist of the "Sunday Press".

L. A. G. STRONG: Born Plymouth, 1896, of predominantly Irish parentage. Spent a great deal of his youth in Ireland. Is widely-known as a writer and broadcaster.

ERIC CROSS: Born 1904, of Irish parentage. Is a research chemist and has done technical writing in that field. Became widely-known on the publication of his book, "The Tailor and Ansty," but since then has written little.

MICHAEL CAMPBELL: Born Dublin, 1924. Is a graduate of Dublin University; and a barrister-at-law. His first stories appeared in previous issues of "Irish Writing."

DENIS IRELAND: Born Belfast, 1894. Served with the Irish Fusiliers in World War 1. Was nominated a Senator in 1948 and is the sole representative from Northern Ireland in the Oireachtas. Has published many books.

PADRAIC COLUM: Born Longford, 1881. One of the leading figures in contemporary Irish literature. Lives in New York.

SEAN O'FAOLAIN: Born Cork, 1900. Has an international reputation as a short-story writer and has also published novels, biographies, plays and travel-books.

TERESA DEEVY: Born in Waterford, now lives in Dublin. Has written many plays which have been produced in Ireland, Great Britain and America, and have been broadcast in Ireland and Britain.

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